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WOODROFFE.

VOL. II.

WOODROFFE

BY

MRS. RANDOLPH

AUTHOR OF

"GENTIANELLA," "WILD HYACINTH," "IRIS,"
"LITTLE PANSY," "RESEDA,"
&c., &c.

"If the earth be as fair as I hear them say,
These flowers her children are
Do they her beauty keep?
They are fresh from her lap, I know;
For I caught them fast asleep
In her arms an hour ago,
With the air, which is her breath—
Her soft and delicate breath—
Over them murmuring low."
Last Days of Pompeii.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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WOODROFFE.

CHAPTER I.

Why stand you thus amaz'd ? Methinks your eyes
Are fix'd in meditation ; and all here
Seem like so many senseless statues ;
As if your soul had suffer'd an eclipse
Betwixt your judgments and affections.

Woman-Hater. SWETNAM.

CONSTANCE had been very considerably astonished by the way in which Mr. Verulam had spoken to her respecting the concert. What could it possibly signify to her whether he approved of it or not? It was so singular, that she could not help meditating upon it for

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some time after she went to her own room, but though she considered it, as she thought, in every possible light, the true interpretation never once struck her. Ultimately she dismissed the thought, and turned to the more congenial one of Colonel Latreille. She never doubted that he loved her, though no hint of such a thing had as yet passed his lips; she felt that he did, and that was quite enough for her.

On the Saturday morning, practising was going on as usual. Constance, Lady Caroline Gorman, and Mr. Berington were rehearsing a trio, not quite to the satisfaction of Herr Blitz, who was perpetually stopping to make them correct a fault or repeat a bar, and gradually working himself up into a state of considerable excitement. Although he claimed all her attention, Constance did not fail to see that a telegram was brought to Colonel Latreille, and that immediately on reading it he rose, looking considerably perturbed, and left the room.

This did not serve to make her more attentive to the matter in hand, and Herr Blitz waxed both furious and plaintive without making much impression upon her. What could it be? Something serious, or he could not have looked so disturbed.

A little while after the trio had been finally disposed of, Lady Louisa came in looking considerably annoyed.

'It is so provoking,' she said; 'Colonel Latreille has just had a telegram which calls him away.'

Constance felt her heart stand still. Going away! Should she ever see him again? Would he remember her? Should they ever again be on the same terms? She could not speak, and felt quite grateful to Lady Caroline, who exclaimed:

'Going away! oh, what a shame! We can't do without him! Lady Louisa, you must forbid it! Say he can't possibly go!'

'My dear, I wish I could,' said Lady Louisa,

heartily, for she had by no means intended that Colonel Latreille should quit Ashford unengaged to Constance. She had been somewhat startled by Mr. Verulam's manner the night before, and felt that there would be no safety until Constance was engaged.

'But of course you can! Tell him you will not allow him to break up your party.'

'I am afraid it would be of no use. It is his mother Lady Susan; she has telegraphed for him, she is very ill.'

'Oh, I know, she has got nerves,' said Lady Caroline, contemptuously.

She had magnificent health herself, and was as incredulous and intolerant of less fortunate persons' ailments, as is often the case with those so happily constituted.

'I am afraid it is something more serious than that, he looked very grave about it. Ah,' as the door opened, 'here he is! My dear

Colonel Latreille, I am more sorry than I can say. I suppose there is no alternative? You really must go?'

'Really I must, this leaves no choice,' and he showed her the telegram. '*Come to me at once. I am dying.*'

'Oh! I hope it is not so bad as that!'

'I trust not. My mother does sometimes exaggerate her symptoms; still you see I have no choice.'

'No, of course not. Well, I can only hope she will soon be all right again, and that you will be here, as we have agreed, for the concert.'

'You cannot hope it so much as I do,' and his eyes wandered to Constance, but she had just turned to answer a remark of Captain Danvers, and did not see him.

'I must lose no time,' he said, 'it will be all I can do to catch the express at Mapleton.

Good-bye, Lady Louisa. I have to thank you for a most pleasant visit.'

The other adieux were hurriedly made. Constance was standing with a group of other girls, there was no chance of saying a private word to her, but he gave her hand a fervent pressure—he hoped she would understand. And then he was gone, and it seemed to Constance as if the sunshine had died out of the day, and almost all interest out of life.

Lady Louisa spoke of his coming back for the concert, but if his mother died, and the telegram said she was dying, of course that would be impossible, neither could he come to Caenthorpe for the ball. It might be months, nay years, before she saw him again, and of course he would soon forget her. What was there in her to enchain his memory, though she had ventured to believe that he did care for her at the present moment? Perhaps even in that she was mistaken; and the extreme

depression of her spirits had an immediate effect upon her voice, so great indeed that Herr Blitz felt a sudden terror that he had overtasked her strength, and prescribed rest and quiet for the remainder of the day.

The loss of one pleasant member of a party always casts a certain gloom over those left behind. Colonel Latreille was liked by all the party, but Lady Louisa's extreme annoyance at his departure, as disturbing her plans, made his leaving an even more important matter than it would otherwise have been.

Certainly the Saturday and Sunday were far less cheerful than all the rest of the visit had been, or at least they seemed so to Constance. She felt now not the slightest reluctance to return home on the Monday morning, though she had hitherto been grieving at the too rapid flight of the hours; she had not the faintest suspicion of what awaited her at home.

'Oh! Conny, how delightful it is to see you again!' exclaimed Yolande, receiving her at the door with an ecstatic hug: 'it seems like a year since you went away! But I am so glad you have been enjoying yourself, and you have really, haven't you?'

'Yes, very much indeed.'

'I knew you would. But I mustn't keep you, mamma wants you at once, and it must be something very particular, for I am not to go in—she wants you alone. Oh! and, Conny, Mr. Verulam was over here ever so long on Saturday, and he said Colonel Latreille was at Ashford, and mamma was very angry, and called us both sly for not having said anything about it, though I told her it was only because she forbade us to mention his name. Oh! and I think there is some great fresh trouble about Basil—at least, papa had a letter on Sunday, and he turned as white as a sheet, and shut himself up all day in the library, and to-day he looks so wretched, and——'

'Don't tell me any more now, dear,' said Constance, gently; 'you say mamma wants me, and it may be something of consequence. You shall tell me everything afterwards.'

'And you have so much to tell me,' said Yolande, as Constance turned towards the drawing-room, wondering greatly what Mrs. Woodroffe could have to say of such importance.

She found her step-mother only half reclining on her sofa, and evidently awaiting her with the greatest impatience.

'How late you are, Conny! I expected you more than an hour ago.'

'I am very sorry, mamma, but they are rather late always at Ashford. Yolande said you wanted me at once.'

'Yes,' and then Mrs. Woodroffe paused.

Somehow, with Constance's deep violet eyes fixed upon her, it seemed by no means so easy to make her announcement respecting Mr. Verulam as she had thought it would be. Perhaps she had better let her know first what a

terrible revelation of his wants Basil had just made. Then, of course, she must at once see the necessity of the case.

'You will be sorry to hear that poor, dear Basil has been most unfortunate,' she said at length; 'some tiresome horse that ought to have won, somehow did not, and he lost a lot of money. Then he went to stay somewhere where they played cards very high, and he was unlucky again, poor fellow. It really is very hard upon him.'

'But, mamma,' said Constance, 'surely it is wrong of him to go on risking money like that? Papa has done so much for him—surely he might deny himself the pleasure of gambling.'

'I hope,' said Mrs. Woodroffe, with considerable asperity, 'I do hope, Constance, that you are not going to turn against your poor brother. Really no one ever does him any justice but me!'

'I don't want to be hard, mamma,' said Con-

stance gently, 'only I can't help being sorry for papa too. Is it very much?'

'Five thousand.'

'Five thousand! Oh! mamma, what is to be done? All the timber by the river is gone, and there is so little left.'

'There *is* a way,' said Mrs. Woodroffe, mysteriously; 'but only one. Basil must have the money by Saturday, or he will be disgraced for ever; he said so plainly. And, of course, that must be prevented at all costs.'

'Of course it must, mamma; but how?'

'I am glad you see it in the right light, Conny, for everything depends upon you.'

'Upon me, mamma! What can I do?'

'Everything, as it happens. Mr. Verulam was here on Saturday.'

Mrs. Woodroffe paused, but Constance's countenance showed no sign of enlightenment.

'Of course you can guess what he came for?'

'No, mamma, not in the very least.'

'You must be very blind, Conny. I have been expecting it for some time. He came to tell your father he wished to marry you.'

'To marry me! Mr. Verulam!'

Constance rose to her feet in amazement, and after a moment sat down again in stupefaction.

'There is nothing to be astonished at,' said Mrs. Woodroffe, peevishly. 'I am sure it has been clear enough ever since that night he dined here. We all saw it then.'

But Constance remained silent. Her brain was in a positive whirl, and she could not think clearly. This, then, was what Basil had meant when he was so particular about her dress the night of the dinner-party, and told her it was of consequence how she looked! This must have been in Mr. Verulam's mind when he spoke so strangely at Ashford about his disapproval of the concert! But it did not in the least dawn upon her that his wishes could have any effect upon her, that anyone

could desire that she should gratify them. She had even forgotten in her amazement that her step-mother had said she was the only person who could help her brother, and had followed the observation by the announcement of Mr. Verulam's visit.

'Well, Conny?' said Mrs. Woodroffe, impatiently, after a long pause.

Constance looked up.

'Mamma, I am sorry he should have taken such a fancy, but of course it is quite ridiculous. Why, he must be as old as papa!'

'Pray do not be absurd,' said Mrs. Woodroffe, petulantly; 'what in the world has age to do with it? You are not a child yourself. Think what a position you would have, what a splendid place Caenthorpe is, what——'

'Mamma, what does all that matter? It does not make me love Mr. Verulam, and I cannot marry him.'

'Constance, think what you say. It is the only thing that can save Basil.'

Constance started and turned very white. This was indeed a complication. It was not all nonsense; it was absolutely true that Mrs. Woodroffe was urging her to give herself to Mr. Verulam. Never had Constance before realised how fervently she loved Colonel Latreille. Her voice shook as she answered,

'How could my marrying save Basil? And, besides, I could never love Mr. Verulam; it would be wrong to marry him.'

'That is absurd,' answered her step-mother; 'there is nothing objectionable about him; you could esteem him, and, after you were married, you would love him quite sufficiently. And it is not as if you cared for anyone else —you have never seen enough of anyone to know them, and the best foundation of love that is to last is esteem. Unless, indeed, you have fallen in love at Ashford,'—this with a sharp glance that covered Constance with burning blushes,—'and then probably it would be with some one who will never think of you

again. And you ask what you could do for Basil. Everything. It is the only hope. Mr. Verulam holds all the mortgages. He offered to reduce the interest at once from four and a half to two per cent., and he hinted at something more, which of course means that he would cancel them, and then Basil would start free in the world again, and, poor dear fellow, surely he cannot always be unlucky! And it is only by going to Mr. Verulam that your father could get this £5,000 in time. Basil said Saturday was the very latest moment. And it all depends on you, Conny. And he said he would give you two thousand a year for pin-money, and settle ten thousand jointure.'

'Don't, don't! I don't want to be bought!' cried poor Constance, in a pained voice.

Poor girl! the world seemed very hard to her at that moment. She had given her heart, she believed herself to be loved in return, but she had nothing to assure her of

it. Ah, if he had only spoken! But then came the bitter thought—How did she know that he ever intended to do so? It was true she had felt quite persuaded that he did so intend; but might she not, after all, have deceived herself, have fancied that what she desired must necessarily come to pass? And had she any right, for what after all might be but the lure of her own false hopes, to refuse to do what it seemed was so earnestly desired by her family? She hardly thought so.

Mrs. Woodroffe, who had never herself had to sacrifice anything (for, as all she wanted was to lie on the sofa and either read or dream, the various privations of the family had touched her but lightly), had always indoctrinated her step-daughter with the belief that it was the privilege of the women of a family to give up everything for the advantage of their husbands and brothers; and Constance, whose natural amiability inclined her to self-sacrifice, had always hitherto

quite agreed with her precepts. But now all was changed.

For the first time it seemed a hardship to do anything for Basil, but, even while she felt this, Constance questioned herself whether she were not very selfish. Had she not always been told how wrong it was to think of herself before others? Yes, but if—if she had not been mistaken—if Colonel Latreille did love her—was it wrong to think of him, as well as herself? But then she was by no means sure, though she had hoped so much. And, even if she were, had she any right to sacrifice Basil to anyone else?

Her mind was thoroughly bewildered: it seemed to her that she no longer could distinguish right from wrong. Of Mr. Verulam himself she really never thought, so full was her mind of Basil, Colonel Latreille, and what it was her duty to do. The remembrance of the unwelcome suitor would come later, at present

her mind had no place for thoughts but of the man who, she had so fondly hoped, was to become her lover.

Mrs. Woodroffe watched her very anxiously, but could make nothing of the expression of her countenance. At length, unable to keep silence, she said:

'Only think, Conny, what it would be! Your father would get rid of all the troubles that make him so sad and anxious, Basil would be quite free, and you would be quite one of the great ladies of the county, and you might do so much for Yolande.'

Still a complete silence: Constance could not speak yet. Her golden visions were gradually fading away, but she had not yet the voice with which finally to dismiss them. She seemed to herself as if almost turned to stone, and incapable of speech or motion.

Mrs. Woodroffe went on:

'It would be a very great marriage even if

it were not for the relief of getting the estate right again. What a disappointment it will be to Lady Louisa! Miss De Vere tried hard for the prize. I saw how she slipped into the place next Mr. Verulam which he intended for you, that night we were at Caenthorpe, only that tiresome Colonel Latreille was stupid and did not understand what he told him. I saw it all then—I suppose you did too?'

'No,' and the answer was so harsh and hollow that it made Mrs. Woodroffe start, and surprised even Constance herself.

'You did not? I thought you must, but your father desired me to say nothing to you. Besides, Mr. Verulam did not speak to him till Saturday.'

'And does he—does papa wish this?'

Constance sat looking straight before her as cold and white as a marble statue.

'Wish it! My dear Conny, of course he does! It will put everything straight and

relieve his mind, besides being such a grand thing for you.'

'Never mind about its being grand for me. Is there *no* other way by which this money can be got for Basil?'

'Not in time. He says he *must* have it by Saturday, and Mr. Verulam is the only hope.'

'Mamma, if I do it—if I can do it, there is one thing—Mr. Verulam must be told that I—that there can be no question of love.'

'My dear, there is no need to tell him such a thing, it would be most unnecessary. Of course he is not likely to be foolishly romantic like a silly boy.'

'I suppose he thinks he is in love with me or he would not want to marry me; there is nothing else he can want me for. He must be made to understand quite clearly that I do it because—because you say I ought, that it will save papa anxiety and put things straight—but that he must not expect me to love him.

I will do what I can, but that I cannot do.'

'It will come all in good time, my dear,' said her step-mother, soothingly.

'But, mamma, promise that he shall be told. Will you do it or—must I?'

'I think it would come better from me,' said Mrs. Woodroffe, hurriedly, thinking that Constance's statement of the fact might very probably be so downright as to wound Mr. Verulam's self-esteem and do irreparable mischief. 'I will be quite sure to make him understand. Oh, Conny dear! if yon knew how happy you have made me by consenting! What a relief it will be to your father! Dear child! we can never be grateful enough to you!'

Constance listened as one in a dream, and let Mrs. Woodroffe kiss her again and again without returning her caresses. At length she rose.

'Do you want me any more, mamma?' she

said, gently, 'I should like to go and take off my things,' and without waiting for an answer she left the room.

Mrs. Woodroffe went at once to her husband in the library where he was anxiously awaiting the result of the interview which he had not dared to conduct himself. He told himself that it was a great thing for Constance, that she would have everything that woman could desire, a fine position, immense wealth, splendid jewels, a house in London—still he could not help a guilty feeling that he was sacrificing her. To do him justice it would even now have been something of a relief to him if she had returned from Ashford engaged to Colonel Latreille; he would have allowed no effort to have been made to break it off, though his wife would certainly have been anxious to make the endeavour.

He looked up as she entered.

'Well? you have told her?'

'Yes, it is all right. She has consented! Oh, Edgar, what a relief it is. Everything will be comfortable now.'

'I trust so,' with a heavy sigh, 'my poor Conny! how did she take it?'

'I am sure there is no reason to pity her, she is a very lucky girl,' said his wife, sharply; 'how did she take it? she seemed quite stunned and dazed at first, but she agreed, only she protests he must be told that she can never love him. I told her that is all nonsense, she will love him quite well enough when they are married.'

'I wish I could feel quite sure of it,' said Mr. Woodroffe, musingly.

'It is a certainty with a well-brought up girl like Conny,' said his wife. 'And now of course you will write to Mr. Verulam?'

'Yes. I must see him about this new mortgage. I shall write and ask him to see me at Caenthorpe to-morrow morning, so that

when he comes here on Wednesday it will be really as an accepted suitor. Adèle, you are sure Conny consented willingly—you did not press her too much?'

'I only put everything clearly before her.'

'And I suppose you were mistaken about Colonel Latreille? Or at least that nothing has come of it.'

'Nothing evidently. I suppose he was only flirting. I am glad he should see that Conny has done so infinitely better.'

'I hope it *is* better:—at any rate, I trust it is well for the child's happiness;' and with a horrible misgiving that it was not, despite all that his wife could say, Mr. Woodroffe went to the writing-table, and began the letter that was to seal his daughter's fate.

Mrs. Woodroffe was not satisfied till she saw the letter safely directed and placed in the letter-box; then she gave a sigh of relief.

When her father's word was once pledged, she felt there would be no further fear that Constance might draw back.

CHAPTER II.

The tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else,
Save what beats there.

King Lear. Act 3, Sc. 4.

THE sudden summons from his mother disturbed all Colonel Latreille's plans exceedingly. As he performed his long and hasty journey, waited at junctions, and missed the trains that it was most desirable that he should catch, he was constantly wondering at himself. Why had he postponed asking the question on which all his future happiness depended? Merely because he had formed an ideal of the time and place where it would be pleasantest

to ask it! It seemed now a perfectly childish reason. He felt bitterly annoyed at having allowed himself to be overcome by a mere sentimental fancy. If it were to come over again! But there! it was useless to think of that. When he saw her again, when they met at Ashford for the concert, he would not again commit such a folly, he would speak at once.

But, if this telegram were true, if his mother were really dying, he should not see her at Ashford. Should he write? He did not like the thought of it, it seemed so cold and stiff, so unlike the glowing words in which he had fancied himself pouring the tale of his love into her ear. No, he must wait to see her again. If no opportunity arose, he must go boldly to the Manor, and ask to see her.

And perhaps, after all, matters might not be so very bad at Latreille Court. His mother was, he well knew, very nervous—even

to himself he would not call it fanciful—and might very possibly have exaggerated her illness. He hoped sincerely it might be so.

The train he had caught at Mapleton was a very slow one, and lamentably behind time. He missed the express at the junction, and reached London too late to be able to pursue his journey that night. The only Sunday train deposited him at the nearest station to Latreille Court about two o'clock in the afternoon, and he eagerly inquired of the groom who awaited him with the dog-cart, for which he had telegraphed, how his mother was.

The man seemed surprised.

'Her ladyship was much as usual, he believed, at any rate, he hadn't heard tell to the contrary.'

Colonel Latreille felt thoroughly puzzled. What could be the meaning of that urgent telegram if his mother were so little indisposed that her own servants did not know of her ill-

ness? Well, he should soon know now, and he drove rapidly up the fine lime avenue without once noticing the beauties on which his eye generally dwelt with infinite pleasure. Indeed he saw only the spot by the lake at Ashford where, had all gone well, he had hoped at this very moment to be alone with Constance.

He made his way rapidly to the boudoir, where his mother usually sat, for the butler informed him that she was downstairs. All seemed as usual: the rose-coloured blinds drawn just low enough to soften the light and render it becoming, without producing inconvenient obscurity, the faint odour of violets with which Lady Susan always surrounded herself, and, lastly, Lady Susan, in her usual graceful, semi-recumbent position on the sofa. She looked up languidly.

'Ah! Bernard, my dear boy, I am so glad you have come!'

'You could hardly have doubted that I should on receiving such a telegram,' he said,

seating himself beside her; 'but, mother, what does it mean? You telegraph that you are dying, and I find you to all appearance as well as usual.'

'I am better to-day,' said Lady Susan, fanning herself gently with a large Spanish fan; 'but really when I got Lady Malvern's letter yesterday morning it was no exaggeration to say I thought I must die. I had a horrible fit of palpitation, and you know how terribly that always unhinges me! I feel quite faint still.'

Colonel Latreille felt inexpressibly provoked. He had been torn away from Constance merely because his mother had had a fit of palpitation, which she always had when anything annoyed her in the slightest degree, whether it was an invitation that did not arrive so soon as she expected, or a dress that did not fit to absolute perfection. So it was with some asperity that he said:

'Surely you need hardly have sent for me for a trifle.'

'A trifle! Have I not told you I really thought I should die? It was such a shock.'

'What? Lady Malvern was staying at Ashford, so she could have told you nothing very dreadful.'

'But it was—very—she told me that you—oh, Bernard, that you were falling into the power of a designing girl who was penniless, and speculating on your fortune. She——'

'That is quite enough,' said Colonel Latreille, with a stony calmness which at that moment was the only alternative for furious passion; 'Lady Malvern wrote an infamous falsehood, and you chose to believe her. The next time you telegraph for me, I shall know how to act.'

'But do you mean that Lady Malvern dreamt it all?' asked his mother, in a bewildered tone;

'that there was no Miss Woodroffe doing all in her power to catch you, and seeming successful?'

'Do not mention Miss Woodroffe's name again unless you do so respectfully,' returned her son; 'she will, I devoutly trust, some day be my wife. If you had not interfered, I should have spoken to her to-day.'

'What a mercy I did! It will give you time to think, and——'

'Mother, once for all, I will brook no interference in this matter. I am no boy: I have seen plenty of the world, and may be safely trusted to choose for myself—certainly I will allow no one to choose for me. You always profess an extreme desire that I should marry, now that I am at last thinking of doing so you at once oppose it.'

'Ah! but, Bernard, it should be some one of our own class, not an adventuress.'

'Miss Woodroffe is the daughter of one of the oldest families in Mapleshire, her mother was

Lady Diana Featherston, her brother is in my own battalion. I fail to see how anyone could be more exactly of our own class.'

'Ah! but Lady Malvern says she is an absolute pauper.'

'Lady Malvern is a mischief-making idiot! She has tried hard enough to make me marry Lady Caroline, who is a "pauper," as you well know, and resents my choosing some one else. If Miss Woodroffe is penniless—I do not know that she is, nor do I care—I have enough for both.'

'But you are not irrevocably entangled yet—do pause and consider.'

Colonel Latreille rose.

'This subject is closed between us,' he said, and left the room.

Lady Susan was a woman of violent and uncontrolled temper, and, furious at being thwarted, she threw herself back on her sofa, and soon brought on an attack of her so-called palpitations, which were a convenient name

for fits of passion. She sent for Colonel Latreille, but he returned for answer that he was sorry to hear she was unwell, but would not disturb her.

In fact he felt so angry that he feared he might lose his temper altogether if he saw his mother again that night. He mistrusted her power of avoiding the topic which he had forbidden, and determined he would not give her the opportunity of irritating him past control. He dined alone, and as he sat smoking afterwards he determined that the time had come that he must ask his mother to quit the Court.

There was really no hardship in this; she had an excellent house in Eaton Square, where she always spent the season, and a very handsome jointure, but it would, he well knew, make her very angry. Still it should be done at once; his house should be absolutely his own before he offered it for Constance's acceptance. He would not tell her himself, that

would be to provoke an explosion such as he hated, but he would write a note and leave it for her when he departed the next morning. He felt too angry at the deception which she had practised upon him through her telegram to see her again just at present.

So, having ordered the dog-cart to be ready at eight o'clock, and signified that he should want breakfast before he started, he sat down to compose his epistle, which he did not find a very easy task. When at length, after many essays, it was finished, it ran thus:

'My dear Mother,

'After what passed between us this afternoon, I think it better that we should not meet again just at present, lest words might be spoken which we should both find it difficult to forget. I am leaving early to-morrow morning, and I hope very shortly to be engaged to the young lady of whom we spoke yesterday. I write these lines, which I

hope you will not think very ungracious, to ask when it would be convenient for you to remove to Eaton Square? It has been very good of you to keep house for me all these years, but, under present circumstances, I need no longer trespass on your kindness, and I feel there are various things that I wish to have done at the Court before it receives its young mistress, which I am sure would interfere with your comfort if you were to remain here. As soon as it is convenient for you to move, I shall give orders as to the alterations I wish made.

'Your affectionate son,

'BERNARD F. LATREILLE.'

This note he himself placed on his mother's table in the boudoir, where it must meet her eye as soon as she came down in the morning, and then betook himself to bed, though not to repose. Invite it as he would, sleep would not come. As he tossed from side to

side, he tormented himself in divers fashions: first blaming his dilatoriness in not having sooner spoken to Constance, and obtained the sweet assurance of her love, next asking himself what right he had to suppose that she cared for him in the very slightest degree, and then picturing her to himself as engaged to Mr. Verulam.

But all this, after all, was only ingenious self-tormenting. In his own heart he felt little doubt of Constance's sentiments, and looked forward to their speedy meeting at Ashford with the utmost impatience. Three weeks! It seemed an eternity! Would it ever pass?

Lady Susan's indignation the next morning knew no bounds when, on coming down a little after eleven as usual, she found that her son had taken his departure, and read the letter he had left for her. So, after all, her reign was over! He had no gratitude, felt no compunction in turning her out of the house which had been hers so long! And

all this for a chit with a pretty face and a sweet voice, of whom he knew little or nothing!

Lady Susan persuaded herself that she should have been delighted if her son had engaged himself to Lady Caroline Gorman, or any other of her own friends, that she could then have abdicated with a good grace. In real fact, whenever the time came, she would have disliked it equally, and would have found that the lady selected was just the one most unsuited to 'poor, dear Bernard.'

However, there being no spectators, Lady Susan did not give herself the trouble of having a fit of 'palpitations.' She wrote a very cold note to her son, expressing herself as 'deeply hurt, but most anxious to relieve him of the annoyance of her presence. The Court would be quite at his disposal in ten days,' and then wrote various other letters connected with her unexpected removal to London.

The time hung very heavily on Colonel Latreille's hands when he found himself in his lodgings in Bury Street. How different the days seemed from those which he had spent the week before with Constance at Ashford! He felt inclined to do nothing but sit and meditate on her perfections, on the happiness that would be his when—if—he won her?

Still he went out sometimes, and on the Friday afternoon, in St. James's Street, he met Basil. He felt as shy of asking for news of the Manor as the most bashful girl could have done. They spoke for a few moments on indifferent topics, the emptiness of London, and so forth, and at length Colonel Latreille contrived to say,

'I hope you have good accounts from the Manor. I spent last week at Ashford, and had the pleasure of meeting your sister.'

'Conny? Ah! to be sure, I know she was there. Then you will not be surprised to hear of her engagement.'

'Her engagement!'

The world seemed to turn round with Colonel Latreille.

He put his hand on an area-railing to steady himself, and continued,

'No, indeed I had not the least idea of it. Who is it?'

Though he did his best to speak as usual, there was something so strange in his voice that Basil looked at him curiously.

'Is there anything wrong with you, Latreille?' he asked. 'You look very ill.'

'No—that is, yes. I don't feel quite the thing. But it is nothing. It will soon pass off. You did not say to whom your sister was engaged.'

'Oh! to Mr. Verulam. It has been going on for some time. I saw how matters were when we were there in July.'

'He is very old for your sister.'

Colonel Latreille dimly felt that he must say something, but the blow had been too

sudden and too severe for him to know very well what he said.

'Oh! he is quite in the prime of life; besides, of course if she does not object to his age, it is no one else's business.'

'Of course not.'

'Verulam is coming up to-morrow.'

An immediate, irrational desire to leave London at once came over Colonel Latreille. It seemed as if it would be impossible to breathe in the same town with his successful rival.

'When you write please offer my congratulations to your sister,' he said, and the two men parted! Basil triumphant and rejoicing, Colonel Latreille stunned and wretched.

Quite oblivious of where he had been going, he retraced his steps at once to his lodgings, and, throwing himself into an arm-chair, began to meditate. What a vain fool he must have been to fancy that he could vie with the attractiveness of a millionaire like Mr. Verulam,

or the temptations of such a place as Caenthorpe Priory! After all, all women were alike! they only cared for wealth and luxury, and, provided they obtained it, were very indifferent as to the source whence it was derived. He had always known it.

What a fool he must have been to allow himself to be deceived, charmed out of his lifelong indifference by a pair of violet eyes and a soft voice! Surely at his age, with his experience of the world, he might have been wiser. Well, the wisest of men had been made fools of by women in their time, why should he expect to escape any more than the rest of his sex? He had always been laughingly told that, as he had so long postponed his attack of love-fever, he was sure to have the disease severely when it came, and the prophecy certainly was fulfilled.

Endeavour as he would to think hardly of Constance, to regard her as one of the mercenary women for whom he felt so unmitigated

a contempt, he could not kill the affection he felt for her. He found himself, in spite of his strongest endeavours, making excuses for her, telling himself there was something in the matter he did not understand.

Some hours had passed before he at length roused himself. He would, he determined, shake off this weakness. He tried to hum to himself, as he dressed, the lines from Wither's 'Shepherd's Resolution.'

> 'If she be not so to me,
> What care I how fair she be?'

He would whistle her down the wind as unworthy of further thought. She had given him every encouragement, he had never felt a doubt of what her answer would be! Well, after all, he was grateful to his mother for her interference which had made him so very angry five days before! If it had not been for her telegram he would have been in infinitely worse plight than was now the case, for he

should have had the mortification of being refused by a heartless flirt and of ministering to her pride and vain glory.

How curiously deceptive women were! He could have staked his existence on Constance's perfect and transparent truth, and yet how completely she had deceived him! Well, the experience was undoubtedly bitter, but at any rate it would suffice for a lifetime. Never again would he trust a woman.

He would not give Miss Woodroffe the triumph of guessing his mortification. He was sure that he could trust himself to meet her, when they stayed at Ashford for the concert, without giving the slightest sign of what his hopes had been, or how cruelly he had felt the disappointment. She should not be able to add his name to the list of conquests of which she could boast, and he smiled bitterly as he thought that this would doubtless prove a mortification. It would be one scalp

the less at her belt, one triumph the less on the feminine war-path.

Hitherto, though he had never fallen in love, Bernard Latreille had respected women, and had never been bitter against them; now there was hardly any form of invective of which he did not persuade himself that he believed them worthy. His lip curled with bitter sneers at his own fatuity in having so easily fallen into the snare: he might have known that in comparison with a millionaire like Mr. Verulam he had no chance.

Instead of hating that gentleman, as he had at first been inclined to do, he really owed him an immense debt of gratitude. Perhaps, if he had proposed to Constance first, the mercenary nature of woman would have induced her to consider the advantage of securing the bird in the hand, and he might have won a bride, who would have had a life-long regret for the loss of her richer suitor.

Yes, doubtless all was for the best, at any

rate he would think so, and, as a consequence of this very wise resolution, he laid his head on his folded arms and gave two or three bitter deep-drawn sobs. Though he tried his hardest not to acknowledge it to himself, the iron had entered into his soul; he was infinitely more miserable than he had ever before deemed it possible that he could be, and that night sleep never visited his eyes.

The next morning the announcement of the marriage was the first thing that caught his eye in the *Morning Post.* No time, certainly, had been lost! No doubt she was already deeply plunged into the excitement of the trousseau—far the most interesting part of marriage to a woman, he believed—and had forgotten that such a person as himself had ever existed. How could the love of a devoted heart for one moment compare with the delights of velvet and lace, and the attractions of such jewels as Mr. Verulam would of course lavish on his bride.

Women are always mercenary. Had not Sir Robert Walpole, who if cynical, yet knew human nature well, said that he had never known but one woman uninfluenced by gold, and she—took diamonds!

Listlessly turning over his letters, he found one from Lady Louisa de Vere. Naturally it was full of the all-absorbing topic.

'It has surprised everyone,' wrote Lady Louisa, 'we none of us had the slightest suspicion of such a thing, indeed, when Constance was here last week I fancied her intentions lay in a very different direction. Of course to anyone so poor as I fear the Woodroffes have become, such a marriage is a great thing, and they cannot afford to object to the disparity of age and birth which would have rendered Mr. Verulam impossible as a *prétendant* to almost any other young lady in the county. He is a fortunate man, and I am sure Mapleshire is greatly to be congratulated on Caenthorpe having so charm-

ing a mistress. I am sure Constance will be a perfect *châtelaine*, and we shall have delightful parties there. We have quite settled now that the concert is to be on Wednesday, the 20th of October, so we shall expect you here on the 18th.'

And then the letter closed with one or two small items of news about some mutual acquaintance.

'Lady Louisa does it very well, but it is sour grapes all the same,' thought Colonel Latreille, with a bitter smile. 'I wonder if she really fancies that anyone will believe that Miss Georgie would have refused Mr. Verulam if he had proposed to her? Of course she guessed my secret, and wants to know if I shall be too cut up to meet Miss Woodroffe again at the concert. Not I, indeed. I am perfectly indifferent to her or to any other woman from henceforth.'

Another letter was from his mother; this he had expected as soon as he saw the announce-

ment of the marriage in the paper. Lady Susan wrote with considerable bitterness, for she had by no means forgiven her son for intimating a wish that she should leave the Court. She congratulated him on his chances of winning Miss Woodroffe, of which not a week before she had seemed so sure, and begged to be told when he wished to begin the preparations for her reception, that could not be commenced till after her own departure.

She had expected that her son, in his mortification and dejection, would write back that he had no further interest in the matter, and that he begged she would stay at the Court as usual. But she had gone too far. Colonel Latreille felt the instinctive longing for solitude and quiet of a sorely wounded animal, and fancied that the Court was at this moment the place which of all the world would suit him best. But he could not live there with his mother, who would not be able, even

if she were willing, to refrain from referring to his disappointed hopes.

So, very greatly to Lady Susan's surprise, he wrote that, though he did not wish to hurry her, he still intended carrying out some alterations at the Court, and only awaited her departure to commence them.

CHAPTER III.

Fathers their children and themselves abuse;
That wealth, a husband, for their daughters choose.
School of Compliments. SHIRLEY.

IT was with a heavy heart that Mr. Woodroffe started on the Tuesday morning for Caenthorpe. He could not feel the perfect satisfaction which his wife professed at everything being made smooth for Basil. Constance's face made his heart ache, it looked so white and rigid. He insisted, greatly to Mrs. Woodroffe's alarm, on seeing her alone in the library before he started, and assuring her that if she had any invincible repugnance to Mr. Verulam he would not press his suit.

But a night's wakeful consideration had persuaded Constance that, where there was any doubt as to which might be the path of duty, it was always safest to choose that which appeared the most rugged and thorny. And so she bent her head meekly beneath her cross, and tried to put away from her the thoughts of what she had hoped might have been.

But, strive as she might, her thoughts would not be controlled. Though she struggled her hardest to think of other things, recollections of Colonel Latreille's words and looks would fill her mind, and it was not wonderful that in the morning her face should bear tokens of the terrible night which she had passed.

But she had made up her mind to do what she had persuaded herself was her plain duty, and told her father in a firm voice that she was ready to marry Mr. Verulam, that she was glad that there was anything which she could do to help him in the trouble that Basil had caused, and that her step-mother knew the one

stipulation which she had made, and had kindly promised to speak to Mr. Verulam herself.

It all sounded most plausible, and Mr. Woodroffe tried hard to shut his eyes to his daughter's set white face, and to feel satisfied: but as he drove from the door his conscience smote him almost as if he were dooming his child to death, and it required the constant repetition to himself of all his wife's most specious arguments to prevent his following his inclination to turn back, throw up the whole concern, and write to Mr. Verulam declining his proposal.

But he did not do so. He only groaned in spirit, and wished weakly that he had had the resolution earlier in life to check Basil's extravagance and self-indulgence firmly. Well, there was no use in thinking of that now! The mischief was done: and Adèle was perhaps right when she said that Mr. Verulam's fancy for Constance was quite providential. At any rate, it seemed the only way out of the difficulty, and as he entered the park at Caenthorpe, Mr. Wood-

roffe looked about him with infinite respect for the wealth displayed, and a dawning satisfaction that his daughter was about to become the owner of so much magnificence.

Mr. Verulam's reception was cordial, but he was evidently somewhat surprised why Mr. Woodroffe had come to him instead of awaiting his appearance at the Manor the next day. In a few well-chosen phrases he expressed his satisfaction at Constance's favourable reception of his suit, and then paused, as if expecting his visitor to explain his presence.

This was by no means an easy task. Mr. Woodroffe was a sensitive man, and felt it hard indeed to say what he wished. At length he plunged into his subject somewhat abruptly.

'Mr. Verulam, it is a matter of business that brings me here this morning. There is no use in having any concealment from you: you hold the mortgages on the Manor, and know the state of my affairs nearly as well as I do myself. Also you know that the debts have been

incurred by the ex—by the imprudence of my son.'

He paused, and Mr. Verulam gave a sign of assent.

'I am sorry to say,' continued Mr. Woodroffe, 'that he—that I had bad news from him the day before yesterday which absolutely necessitates another mortgage.'

Mr. Verulam raised his eyebrows.

'The estate is heavily laden already. How much do you wish to raise?'

'Nothing under five thousand will do, he says.'

'Of course you are aware that that is the utmost extent of your borrowing powers; that you can never hope to raise another shilling?'

'I know it.'

'But your son? Do you think he will suddenly stop in his wild career of extravagance? If he does not, what can you do?'

'I do not know,' said the harassed father:

'perhaps the utter certainty that there is no more money to be had may steady him. But you see me here to-day as a suppliant. Will you advance the £5,000? You see it must be forthcoming on Saturday. You know what security there is, but you also know how impossible it would be to get the requisite deeds executed in time. It is a great favour I am asking, but I do not really know to whom else to apply. You can, I think, trust me to execute the deeds as speedily as possible.'

'I have not the slightest apprehension on that score.'

'Then will you do what I ask?'

Mr. Verulam rose from his seat, and walked slowly three or four times up and down the room, evidently in deep thought. At length he drew his chair opposite to Mr. Woodroffe, sat down deliberately, and, leaning forward, said,

'Mr. Woodroffe, you will forgive me, if I speak very plainly? In really important mat-

ters it is essential to do so, but I do not wish to offend you.'

'Pray say whatever you think right.'

'Well then, it seems to me that you have sacrificed everything to your son without his being in the slightest degree grateful to you. You and your family live uncomfortably that he may gamble, and throw himself into every kind of dissipation. I told you that, in the event of Miss Woodroffe doing me the honour to accept me as a suitor, I would at once reduce the interest on the mortgages. This fresh requirement of money on your part alters the complexion of affairs, and inclines me to make to you a fresh proposition. If I advance this money, this £5,000, which Captain Woodroffe so imperatively needs, at such short notice, will you give up to me the management of your estate, at any rate for a time? I need not say I speak entirely in your own interest. I would pay you £3,000 a year, and also pay your son the allowance, whatever it

may be, that you now make him. It would give me the power of arranging his affairs considerably better than he is able to do himself, or than—forgive me—I think you are likely to be capable of doing. Business habits are useful in cases of this nature. Only you must give me an undertaking in writing—not for my own satisfaction, but that I may have it to show your son—that you will on no pretence whatever pay another bill for him, or advance him a single shilling. I do not ask you to answer me at this moment. I have a letter to write, and will leave you for a short time to think it over. It is the only plan which will enable me to advance the money you require, and will, I feel sure, conduce greatly to your comfort and peace of mind. Besides, I am confident that, with my command of capital and knowledge of business matters, I shall very soon make an immense difference in the value of the Manor. Think all this over, and remember, besides,

that it will be the best thing in the world for your son to be checked in his extravagance.'

Before Mr. Woodroffe could reply, his host had left the room.

Mr. Woodroffe sat bewildered, but, when he began to think the matter over, he saw at once that he had no choice but to accept the offer made to him. Mr. Verulam had distinctly said it was the only condition on which he would advance the required sum, and in his heart he felt that he was quite right in what he said of the arrangement being good for Basil himself. Then, too, £3,000 a year clear, seemed to him, after the privations of past years, wealth untold. He felt what a relief it would be, what a comfort that he would be able to lay by something for Yolande!

His wife would think it very cruel to Basil. That was the only drawback. Still even she must acknowledge that, as Mr. Verulam made

the acceptance of his scheme the condition of his assistance, there was no alternative; it must be accepted.

When Mr. Verulam returned he found, as he had anticipated, that his visitor was quite willing to accept his terms.

'Then,' he said, 'I think you had better leave it to me to arrange matters with your son. I should prefer your telling him nothing of the agreement we have come to. I shall have a good deal of business with him, and prefer transacting it in my own way. Write and ask him to meet me at my rooms at Piccadilly on Saturday morning, and to bring with him a full and clear schedule of his liabilities. He will do so more willingly if he is unaware that I am to have some sort of control over him in future.'

Mr. Woodroffe knew that this was very true; he almost dreaded Basil's wrath when he heard the terms to which his father had agreed. After a few more observations on

business he took his leave, with the understanding that Mr. Verulam was to come over the ensuing day to be accepted as a suitor in due form.

As he entered the house, he met Constance and stopped to kiss her.

'Everything is right,' he said, 'Mr. Verulam is deeply gratified at your decision, and will tell you so in person to-morrow. He will do everything for Basil and all of us. Conny, my darling, we owe you a debt of gratitude.'

'I am glad, papa,' was all the girl said.

It seemed to her, as she looked at her father, that he really appeared ten years younger. Well, this was a tangible reward for her bitter sorrow, and a comfort, as it seemed a proof that she had, in her perplexity, chosen the true path of duty.

Mrs. Woodroffe was hysterically indignant at Mr. Verulam's avowed intention of curbing Basil's expenditure.

'Extravagance indeed! what did he know

of the matter? The poor, dear boy was always misrepresented and misjudged; he only did just like his companions, and what was necessary in his position. At any rate his own father need not have been so hard-hearted as to promise never to help him; it was quite impossible he could live on his allowance.'

'Do be sensible, if you can, Adèle,' said Mr. Woodroffe, more irritably than he had ever in his life spoken to his cherished wife; 'you know you are talking nonsense. Basil has been disgracefully extravagant, and it is our weak indulgence which is to blame. However, it is too late to talk of that now—the mischief is done. But don't try to make him dissatisfied with such an offer as Mr. Verulam's, which is the truest kindness, for it saves him from himself. If he will only be sensible now, he will really get the estate cleared and be comfortable. If only we had not to sacrifice Conny!'

'Sacrifice! but it is no use talking, Edgar.

Something has changed you. You are cross to me and harder than ever on poor, dear Basil,' and Mrs. Woodroffe dissolved into tears, but to her infinite surprise her husband, instead of petting and consoling her, left the room.

Yolande, who had not been enlightened as to what was going on, spent the day a victim to the most fevered curiosity. It had been a bitter disappointment the preceding afternoon to find herself excluded from her sister's room, and to be deprived of all the details for which she was hungering respecting the visit to Ashford, and as she supposed the courtship of Colonel Latreille.

But Constance's voice was so piteous when she begged to be left alone, that Yolande could not remonstrate, and, when she saw the white set face the next morning, felt that there was somethiug which she did not understand. It had evidently something to do with Mr. Verulam, for after his long visit on Saturday her father was now going to Caenthorpe, and

she heard him say he would come to luncheon the next day.

But what could Mr. Verulam have to do with Conny? The connection was quite beyond Yolande's comprehension, for the thought of such an old man as he appeared to her as her sister's suitor never entered her mind.

Constanec, accompanied by her faithful Ross, had disappeared again to her own room, and Mrs. Woodroffe would say nothing to gratify her daughter's curiosity, telling her that little girls should not be inquisitive, and otherwise tantalising her.

When they went up to bed that night she could bear it no longer, and asked so plaintively whether she might not come to Constance's room that her sister could not refuse. Besides, now the most agonising time, the time of doubt of what she ought to do, was over: she had taken her resolution, the next day it would be known to everyone, it was

only right that Yolande should hear it first.

She sat down in the arm-chair where she had spent all the previous afternoon and the greater portion of the night, and Ross curled himself up on her lap, and looked in her face as he had done so often during those long weary hours of grief and indecision, when the hot tears that rained on his head had surprised him so much. Yolande knelt down before her.

'Conny darling, you are in trouble. What is it? Let me know.'

Constance stroked her sister's cheek.

'The worst is over now, Yolande dear. It was yesterday when I could not quite see what was right, what I ought to do, that was so trying.'

'Right about what? What is it?'

'Whether I would accept Mr. Verulam.'

'Accept Mr. Verulam! You! Do you mean to say you are going to marry him,' almost

screamed Yolande, rising to her feet in the sublimity of her amazement.

'Yes, I daresay it surprises you, dear. It did me at first. I had no idea that he thought of such a thing. But—you don't know all about it. It seems he holds all the mortgages which weigh poor papa down so—and he promised that if—I would marry him he would do something to make them easier, and also advance the £5,000 Basil wants on Saturday.'

'Of course! I knew it was Basil!' cried Yolande, passionately. 'Conny! Conny! why are you so weak? Why should you throw away your youth and beauty on a purse-proud old man who might be your grandfather, when, if you had only justice done you, all London might be at your feet? What has Basil ever done that you should ruin all your life for him? What has he done, what will he ever do, except sacrifice everyone he can to his own selfish enjoyment? Conny, think

before it is too late. You can't *want* to marry Mr. Verulam.'

'Dear,' said Constance, drawing her close to her and kissing her cheek: 'I know you mean all you say for the best. But don't say it again, it hurts me. It is not only Basil, —it is papa. If you had seen the difference in his face when he came back from Caenthorpe to-day after it was all settled! It made me feel I had done right. He looked ten years younger at least.'

'But Conny—I thought—I fancied—when Colonel——'

'I think we had better not talk about it any more, dear,' said Constance, quietly.

She felt that if Yolande mentioned Colonel Latreille it would be more than she could bear. Her only hope was, she felt, to put him as completely as was possible out of her mind. There was a pause, and then she continued:

'I thought it all out yesterday, and I believe I decided on what it was right for me to do. Women can do so little, I am very glad to be able to help papa at all—it is a great privilege.'

'I don't understand you,' said Yolande, half sobbing; 'of course, Conny, I know that you would never do anything you didn't think right, but I can't see how it can be. An old thing like that! and you young and beautiful. Oh! it is like Beauty and the Beast!'

'You mustn't say anything of that sort again, Yolande,' said Constance, gently; 'remember he is to be my husband. And now, dear, good night. I could not sleep last night, and am very tired.'

'And if you don't sleep to-night, the fine young prince will find a wan lady-love to-morrow. I understand,' said Yolande, sarcastically: 'Good night, Conny dear, I beg your pardon! I'll try and behave better, but I'm too surprised

and too sorry to know quite what I'm saying to-night,' and with a kiss she departed, leaving Constance to fall into the dreamless sleep of utter exhaustion.

Mr. Verulam arrived about twelve o'clock the next day and was received first by Mrs. Woodroffe, for Constance insisted that, before she saw her suitor, he should be told that, though she had agreed to marry him, there could never be any question of love between them.

As she was really conscientiously anxious that he should clearly understand this, it was a pity that she did not tell him herself, for Mrs. Woodroffe only gave a very much softened form of the statement.

'Of course, dear Conny was startled and surprised, she had never suspected Mr. Verulam's sentiments. She was overwhelmed with gratitude at his generous intentions towards her family, but—she was by nature shy and very reticent, he must not expect her to be at all

demonstrative, he must not be disappointed to find her very calm and cold. He would, she was sure, make allowances; when Constance was once his wife, he would find her most warm-hearted and affectionate.'

Mr. Verulam replied that he perfectly understood, that he considered himself only too fortunate to have obtained Miss Woodroffe's consent, and would expect no demonstrations from her. Might he see her at once? He would like to hear his happiness from her own lips; and Mrs. Woodroffe went to summon her.

'You have told him, Mamma?'

'Yes, love, he quite understands. I would not refer to it again, if I were you, it would seem ungracious.'

Constance sighed. She had half hoped that Mr. Verulam might decline to marry a girl who told him plainly that she could never love him. However, she must console herself with the thought of having comforted and relieved her

father of his pressing troubles, and she went steadily down-stairs to consummate the sacrifice she had begun.

Perhaps Mr. Verulam was more nearly nervous while he awaited Constance in the drawing-room than he had ever been in his life. Love-making was a totally new experience to him, and, though elated at his success, he hardly knew how to acquit himself in this new phase of existence.

When Constance appeared he went forward to meet her, and when she extended her hand raised it to his lips with a bow that would not have disgraced Sir Charles Grandison. But his attempt at a fine sounding speech was a failure: he absolutely stammered, and was deeply annoyed at appearing as he thought so ridiculous. At length he managed to convey to Constance his gratitude for her acceptance of his suit, and produced a most superb diamond and ruby ring, of which he begged her acceptance.

Even while thanking him for and admiring it, Constance felt a cold shudder pass over her as he placed it on her finger. This tangible evidence of her engagement seemed to cut her off entirely from any lingering hope of escape, and when Mr. Verulam, with a certain timidity, put his arm around her waist, and, kissing her cheek, called her 'his dearest Constance,' she felt that her doom was indeed sealed.

Blushingly she endeavoured to refer to her gratitude for the relief he had promised to her father, but he stopped her quickly. Even to his ear the mention of it at this moment reduced the whole affair too much to the nature of a bargain. He made some observations on her tastes, said she must come over to Caenthorpe and suggest any alterations she might wish, and looked and felt immensely relieved when the gong sounded for luncheon. He felt that the next time they were alone together the tension would not be so great, the

keynote would not have been pitched so high.

Mrs. Woodroffe looked at them anxiously; she feared that Constance might after all have thought it necessary to inform her lover of the impossibility of her ever loving him. But the sight of the ruby ring at once calmed her fears; if Constance wore that all must be well, and in her extreme satisfaction she became more animated and conversational than was her wont. Her chatter was an infinite relief.

Constance felt it almost impossible to speak; the conflict of her feelings appeared as if it must choke her. Yolande, contrary to her wont, was absolutely dumb; Mr. Woodroffe, always taciturn, had his mind full of business details which he knew must be gone into that afternoon, and Mr. Verulam, though master of the situation, felt an unusual diffidence and disinclination to talk.

But Mrs. Woodroffe talked on, promised to

drive over to Caenthorpe the next day to see the gardens with Conny, professed an anxiety she was far from feeling to see the orchid-house, and, in short, took the whole burden of the conversation on herself.

After luncheon the two gentlemen disappeared into the library, and did not emerge till nearly four o'clock, when Mr. Verulam came to take his leave. When he was gone, Constance slipped away from her step-mother's enthusiastic praise of Caenthorpe, put on her hat, and went down to Miss Lucy's cottage.

Miss Lucy had only returned that afternoon from a visit to an old friend in Warwickshire, and knew nothing of all that had taken place. Constance sat down and told it her quietly.

Aunt Lucy's sorrow was very great. She had so hoped that she saw a happy future in store for her darling niece, and now it had all passed away. What could Colonel Latreille

have meant? She had felt so very sure that he was in earnest. Well, the only thing now was to make the best of it.

'Conny dearest, have you thought it all over well? are you sure you are doing right in consenting?'

'I think so, Aunt Lucy. I thought and thought, and it seemed the clear duty.'

'If—' and Miss Lucy hesitated—'if, dear child, your heart is yours to give, if there is no one else——'

Constance flushed crimson, and then turned very white.

'No one has ever spoken a word of love to me,' she said; 'no one ever will. And Mr. Verulam knows—I asked mamma to tell him—that I would give him respect and obedience, but not love; that I could not do.'

CHAPTER IV.

> I am not form'd, by flattery and praise,
> By sighs and tears, and all the whining trade
> Of love, to feed a fair one's vanity.
>
> *Tancred.* THOMSON.

MR. WOODROFFE loyally observed the promise he had made to Mr. Verulam, and gave no hint to Basil of the nature of the communication that would be made to him on the Saturday.

Basil being of a sanguine disposition took it for granted that everything would arrange itself according to his wishes: he thought that the reduction of the interest on the mortgages was only an instalment of

the good things to be brought about by Constance's marriage, and felt no doubt that Mr. Verulam would not only announce his intention of cancelling them altogether, but would make some pleasant suggestion as to being always ready to help him with money. Where was the use of a fellow being so rich, if he was not anxious to help the brother of the girl he was going to marry? Altogether it was in a very jubilant frame of mind that he presented himself at Mr. Verulam's rooms in Piccadilly, on the Saturday morning.

In some things Mr. Verulam was very shrewd and had a clear insight into character, and he knew, as well as if a map of Basil's thoughts had been spread before him, that his future brother-in-law looked upon him in the light of the goose that was henceforth to lay golden eggs for his benefit.

All such anticipations he intended to nip in

the bud: extravagance was in his eyes the unpardonable sin, and he was fully determined that not a shilling of his should minister to it. He felt quite sure that, by his management of the Manor property, he should very speedily raise its value, and that it would prove very far from a bad investment, but he also felt a certain satisfaction in the thought of the power the arrangement would give him over Basil.

After the first greetings were over, Mr. Verulam observed:

'And now we had better apply ourselves to business. I asked your father to request you to bring the schedule of all the debts for which the £5,000 is so urgently required.'

'It's awfully good of you to advance it,' said Basil; 'yes, the governor said something of a schedule, but of course that isn't necessary when one isn't dealing with a lawyer. I've just written down a few items.'

'Kindly allow me to see them.'

Reluctantly Basil drew a paper from his pocket and handed it across the table.

'It seems,' said Mr. Verulam, after he had perused it, 'that this memorandum refers only to debts of honour. I presume this is not all you owe, as the total does not reach the £5,000 which you stated was indispensable.'

'£3,500 is indispensable on Monday, for settling day,' said Basil. 'I know I owe a lot of bills, I really don't know how much, so I thought I had better make it an even sum at once. I suppose that will clear me.'

Mr. Verulam frowned ominously.

'This is hardly a very business-like way of proceeding,' he said; 'I am afraid I must trouble you for particulars.'

'Why?' said Basil, in astonishment, 'what does it possibly signify? My father won't care for details, he never does, and of course he has settled with you about the security; it will be all right.'

'Perhaps if Mr. Woodroffe had thought more

of details it might have been better both for you and himself,' answered Mr. Verulam, drily. 'But the matter does not stand quite as you imagine. Your father and I have entered into an agreement which will prevent your being in future able to trouble him, as you have hitherto done, for money, and will oblige you to keep within the bounds of your allowance. I have agreed to take the management of the estate off his hands, to allow him a certain income, to start you perfectly clear, and to continue your allowance. You will see, therefore, that I have a right to demand a clear statement of your debts, otherwise I cannot liquidate them.'

'I could settle them perfectly with this £5,000. There is no necessity for troubling you,' said Basil.

He did not at all relish the idea of Mr. Verulam criticising his expenditure, sundry items of which he preferred keeping to himself.

'That would hardly suit my notions of business,' replied Mr. Verulam.

In his own mind he felt a conviction that if Basil got possession of the money the debts, excepting of course those of honour, would never be paid.

'I can't think how my father could consent to any such arrangement,' exclaimed Basil, angrily. 'I shall write and tell him it will not do at all.'

'Then of course there is nothing more to be said,' observed Mr. Verulam, quietly. 'I thought there was urgent necessity for the money on Monday, but I conclude such is not the case.'

'But indeed it is. I *must* have it.'

'But as you so emphatically refuse my terms you of course mean to obtain it elsewhere. As we have no further business matters to discuss, I am afraid I must wish you good morning. I have much to settle before leaving town this afternoon.'

He rose as he spoke, and stood as if expecting Basil to take his leave.

'But do you mean you will not advance me the money? You know there is no time to get it anywhere else!' cried Basil, in dismay; 'my father wrote that you had agreed.'

'So I did on the terms I mentioned to you. They are the only ones I am prepared to entertain.'

'Well, I suppose I must agree,' with a very bad grace: 'what is it I am to do?'

'Send me an accurate list of everyone to whom you owe no matter how small a sum. All the bills shall be discharged and the receipts forwarded to you. A quarter's allowance in advance will be placed to your account, but, in order that we may not have again to refer to an unpleasant topic, I wish you clearly to understand that, though I am willing now to start you free, it must not be considered a

precedent. It will not be of the slightest use for you ever to apply to me for assistance again. Do you understand?'

'Yes,' said Basil, sulkily.

He would have given worlds to refuse the offer, and tell Mr. Verulam he thought him a mean old shopkeeper; and would certainly have done so, but for the remembrance of Tattersall's, and of the impossibility of his showing his face there without his brother-in-law's aid.

But all his golden visions of the use to which Constance's husband was to be put began rapidly to fade away. He was sure that Mr. Verulam not only meant what he said, but was quite certain not to change his mind. He almost regretted he had urged the marriage on his father; if he had not done so, he believed Mr. Woodroffe would never have listened to such a thing. Still if he had not been engaged to Constance he supposed Mr. Verulam would not have produced the money which he so urgently required.

And after all, he reflected, the affair was to a certain extent in his own hands. He need not give the names of those tradesmen his dealings with whom he wished to conceal: they were, after all, but a small minority, and he could always rely on his father giving him any money he wanted without asking inconvenient questions.

Perhaps, after all, it might not be such a bad thing for him—naturally Basil only thought of the effect on himself. Mr. Verulam's management, and, above all, his money, would do wonders for the estate; doubtless, when it came to him, it would not only be free, but its value greatly increased. Of course it was annoying to find that all the hopes of unlimited borrowing in which he had been indulging were not destined to be fulfilled, still he could not help himself, and there was always the hope that his brother-in-law might be better than his word.

'I am glad we understand each other,' said

Mr. Verulam. 'Here are pens and paper. Will you be so good as to write me out the list at once?'

'But I may forget some.'

'Take your time; there is no hurry. I have some business too, and shall not interrupt you;' and Mr. Verulam sat down at a large bureau, and became apparently immersed in sheets of figures, while Basil remained at the centre table, biting the top of his pen, and every now and then writing down a name. By the time that Mr. Verulam, having finished his calculations, locked his bureau, and rose from his feet, the list had attained formidable dimensions.

'You are sure this represents the whole?' asked Mr. Verulam, glancing over it, as Basil pushed it across the table to him.

'Yes, I think so,' answered Basil, with, however, the mental reservation, 'all that I mean you to know anything about.'

'Well, it is a long list, but, as I said, they

shall all be paid at once. And now I must wish you good morning. I expect my lawyer in five minutes, and must then hurry not to miss the train.'

'He might have asked me to luncheon,' thought Basil, who saw preparations for that meal through a half-open door as he passed out. 'After all, I expect he will turn out an awful screw. If it hadn't been for the mortgages, and for the fact that she has no opportunities of seeing anyone, Conny might have done better. Well, if he gives the governor a comfortable income, I can always get something to go on with, and of course he'll give Conny a lot of pin-money, and as she's never been brought up to spend, she won't know what to do with it, so, after all, it may not be such a bad thing.'

Meanwhile, by way of getting as much as possible out of the present liquidation of his affairs, he strolled into several shops, told the proprietors that their bills were about to be

sent for and paid, and ordered divers articles at each, with directions that they should be entered under a considerably earlier date. He thus prudently provided himself with a large stock in hand of clothes, cigars, gloves, and other articles.

When Mr. Verulam presented himself at the Manor on the following Monday—it was not in accordance with his strict view of the stiff proprieties of life to go over on the Sunday—he found Constance far more like her natural self than she had been when he last saw her.

It was not that the girl liked the prospect before her any better than she had done at first: indeed, the more she thought of it, the more appalled she felt at the perspective of long, loveless years that lay before her. But, having convinced herself that it was her duty to sacrifice herself for her father and brother, she was determined that she would not show her repugnance. What it was her

duty to do, should be done with a good grace.

Mr. Verulam was by no means an exacting lover; amatory endearments were but little in his line. He considered it part of the necessary programme to kiss Constance's cheek, and she contrived heroically to suppress the shudder which she felt at the touch of his lips, but after this first salute he evidently felt that his duty in that respect was fulfilled.

Their conversation was somewhat stiff: when she had thanked him for and expressed her admiration of the splendid diamond bracelet he had brought her from London, and observations had been made upon the weather both present and prospective, the ideas of both seemed to be exhausted.

Constance wished fervently that Mrs. Woodroffe or Yolande would come in and interrupt their *tête-à-tête*, but of that she feared there was no chance: she would have to wait till luncheon brought her release: and, as she ascertained by a

furtive glance at the clock, it yet wanted almost an hour to that happy moment. At length Mr. Verulam said,

'My dear Miss Woodroffe' (he was too stiff and formal to call her Constance), 'I have a request to make which I trust will not be disagreeable to you, for it will distress me greatly if you refuse it.'

'I am sure, if it is anything in my power,' began Constance, and then paused, not knowing exactly what to say.

'It is in your power, or I should not ask it,' with a slight accent of reproof, as if she should not suspect him of requiring impossibilities. 'I daresay you remember our conversation on the night when I dined at Ashford, the night of the rehearsal?'

'You mean about the concert?'

'Precisely: as you may remember, I expressed my very strong objection to the idea of ladies appearing in public, and urged upon you the propriety of withdrawing your name from

the programme. Need I say that my objections are now increased a hundredfold, and that the favour I ask is that you will now retire.'

'But,' said Constance, colouring, for she felt a guilty consciousness that, useless, hopeless, agonising as it would be, she was looking forward with feverish anxiety to the visit to Ashford for the concert, and the chance of seeing Colonel Latreille once more,—'but, Mr. Verulam, you said that what you asked was something which I could do. But this is impossible. I promised Lady Louisa, and I cannot break my word.'

'Lady Louisa will perfectly understand that circumstances are altered, and that you can no longer perform your promise.'

'But, then, nothing has happened that need prevent my doing so. I am quite as able to sing as ever.'

'I am sorry,' loftily, 'my earnest wishes appear to have no weight.'

'Of course I should consider them if I were

making a promise now, but this is different. Lady Louisa perhaps exaggerates the value of my assistance, but she has declared from the first that the concert would be impossible without me: she has had an immense amount of trouble about it. She has been very kind to me, and I think it would be very ungrateful of me to disappoint her at such short notice. You know the concert takes place in ten days.'

Mr. Verulam's countenance was still lowering.

'I must again express my disappointment that my wishes do not weigh with you. Lady Louisa, who is quite a woman of the world, would perfectly understand the situation. I had hoped you would have been superior to the wish to display your undoubtedly great vocal powers to a vulgar audience.'

'You surely cannot believe that that is what weighs with me,' said Constance, indignantly: 'for myself I would give it up at once, since

you wish it, though I confess I cannot see any objection. But I have always been taught that a promise, no matter on how trivial a matter, is a a sacred thing, and I am sure if you consider for a moment you would not wish me to break my word.'

'Of course, it must be as you decide,' said Mr. Verulam, very stiffly; 'I can only regret that my first request should have been refused.'

Constance felt that this was not only ungenerous but unjust. She was about to make another attempt to induce him to see the matter in the right light, but, with a wave of his hand, he dismissed the subject, and began to make an arrangement for her coming over to lunch at Caenthorpe with Mrs. Woodroffe.

'And may Yolande come? She would enjoy it so,' said Constance.

'I am always delighted to grant any request of yours,' he replied, in a tone meant to point

out the difference between his own conduct and hers.

Constance blushed with vexation, and wished she had said nothing about Yolande. She welcomed with infinite satisfaction the summons of the luncheon bell.

After luncheon, Mr. Verulam had a conversation with Mr. Woodroffe, and told him of his interview with Basil. He intimated that he fancied the £5,000 would be insufficient for all the liabilities, repeated the emphatic warning that he had given the young man that he must expect nothing more from him, and advised Mr. Woodroffe at once to make him clearly understand that he, too, could do nothing for him.

'It is the only hope of checking his wild extravagance,' he said; 'he seemed to think nothing whatever of having burdened the estate to the full extent, and seems to fancy he has only to go on spending, and that money must always be forth-

coming. The sooner he is undeceived the better.'

'Yes, I know,' said Mr. Woodroffe, feebly.

He knew as well as Mr. Verulam could tell him that that gentleman was quite right, but he mistrusted his own power to do what his better sense dictated.

After Mr. Verulam left him, he sat a long time musing over what he had better do. He at length decided that it was of no use to try to keep the arrangement of his affairs a secret from his wife, which he would much have preferred doing. Basil was sure to tell her, and it would be better that she should hear it from himself.

But he must keep the money in his own hands, and make all household payments himself; if he did not, he knew perfectly well that a large portion of it would find its way from his wife's hands to those of the step-son she loved so well and had so terribly spoiled.

He wrote Basil a long letter, telling him

that now that he was started free, and had a quarter's allowance in hand, he had quite made up his mind to turn a deaf ear to any application he might hereafter make to him for money, as he must endeavour to save for Mrs. Woodroffe and Yolande, who at his death would be penniless.

He was annoyed with himself when he read the letter over, feeling that it was very cold and stiff, not from any want of affection on his part, but rather that he had been guarding himself so carefully from any admission of weakness. He debated if he should write another, but he did not write easily, post-time was very near, and the letter went.

When he disclosed the arrangement to his wife, she was excessively angry, wept bitterly over the injustice of which poor dear Basil was always the victim, and declared vehemently that Mr. Verulam had disappointed her—she should never like him. Ultimately, however, she found a consolation in the thought, which

had already occurred to Basil, of Constance's pin-money; the greater portion of it must, of course, be devoted to her brother.

Three days after this, Constance received a letter from Lady Louisa de Vere.

'My dear Constance,

'I am afraid, after all our preparation, the concert must be given up. I have been worried more than I can tell you. Caroline Gorman wrote a few days ago to say she couldn't come as she had a bad relaxed throat, and mustn't sing for weeks. (*Entre nous:* I believe the real English of this is that she wants to go to Parkenford for the balls. I heard on Tuesday she had been asked.) Then Captain Danvers has been ordered off to Ireland, and there is no chance of his getting leave from that distracted country, and Mr. Berington has lost his father. Did you ever hear of such a chapter of accidents? It really reduced the company to yourself, the Leesons,

and Colonel Latreille!—all very good, of course, but quite too few. (By-the-by, Colonel Latreille's sudden summons was, I hear, only a whim of his mother's, there was nothing really the matter. So *provoking* of her breaking up our party.) I was really in absolute despair when dear Mr. Verulam called. My dear, he is the *most generous* of men! You are a lucky girl! He saw at once the *impossibility* of replacing our losses in time so,—only just think how good of him,—he begged me not to vex myself, and absolutely volunteered to pay off the debt on the hospital, and the hire of the Town Hall. So now, of course, there is nothing to have the concert for. I only hope Carry Gorman won't think it is because she disappointed us! She is quite conceited enough already. I must really write and tell her of the other failures.

'Of course, now the concert is given up, we have put off our party; it would be ridiculous to have it without an object. And we are now

going a tour of visits. But we shall be back and have a large party for the Caenthorpe house-warming. I suppose before that the happy day will be fixed? I am sure Mr. Verulam must be most impatient. My sister Selina, who is to do the honours for him in December, is absolutely dying to see you, and persecutes me with questions. What a screed I have inflicted upon you!

'My kindest remembrances to Mr. and Mrs. Woodroffe.

'Yours ever affectionately,

'LOUISA DE VERE.'

Lady Louisa congratulated herself, as she read over her carefully considered epistle, on having so worded it that no one could possibly discover an indication of her bitter disappointment at Mr. Verulam's choice. She need not have troubled herself to throw dust into Constance's eyes. The girl was absolutely guiltless of a suspicion that anyone could or did envy

her; to herself her lot seemed by no means fascinating.

Her feelings respecting the collapse of the concert were curiously mixed. A certain relief that she was no longer obliged ungraciously to oppose Mr. Verulam, yet a slight disappointment that the result of so much trouble and practising was not to be given to the world.

As to the certainty of not seeing Colonel Latreille, she could not herself have told whether sorrow or satisfaction predominated. She would have given worlds to see him again, and yet—she dimly felt that it might be better for her future peace of mind if she never saw him more.

CHAPTER V.

God pity them both! and pity us all,
Who vainly the dreams of youth recall.

For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: 'It might have been.'

Maud Muller. WHITTIER.

VERY soon Mr. Verulam began to beg that the day might be fixed, and to suggest that it should be as soon as possible after his house-warming ball. He greatly wished that the marriage might take place earlier, but he felt that, as he had issued his invitations for the ball, he could not well postpone it, though, had he only known the happy fate that awaited him, he could naturally have delayed the fes-

tivities until his wife would have done the honours for him, but as it was the original programme must be observed; there need, however, be no further delay.

He made this suggestion in the first instance to Mrs. Woodroffe, who quite agreed with him as to the advisability of the wedding being as soon as possible. The sooner Constance was married, the sooner would she have money to give to Basil whom everyone seemed to have united to oppress. She made some observation about a trousseau taking some time, when Mr. Verulam at once replied that, if she had no very insurmountable objection, he should prefer that there should be no trousseau at all. He proposed that they should spend their honeymoon in Paris, and Constance could procure a very much better outfit there; besides, he confessed he should himself like to have a voice in the matter.

This suggestion suited Mrs. Woodroffe's native indolence admirably, and was a great relief to

Constance herself, who felt but little inclined for discussions on tints and shades, or comparison of the merits of silks and satins; but it was a bitter disappointment to Yolande who had a strong taste for dress and had looked forward greatly to the excitement of choosing her sister's outfit, her hopes even going the length of a possible visit to London.

Constance was sorry for her disappointment, and as some amends made a point of Mr. Verulam's specially inviting her to his ball, and was so eloquent on the subject that she at length wrung from Mrs. Woodroffe a reluctant consent.

'She is much too young, Conny, only sixteen. I can't hear of such a thing. It will make people always fancy her so much older than she is.'

'Dear Mamma, it is not as if it were a London ball. She is not likely to have much dissipation here, and it would be such a pity she should miss a pleasure.'

'Well, Conny, I suppose you must have your own way, brides-elect always do. But I expect Yolande's going out will be very different from what yours has been. You are sure to have a great deal of company at Caenthorpe, and I suppose Mr. Verulam means to have a house in London.'

'He bought what he tells me is the largest house in Carlton Terrace when he was in town the beginning of the week.'

'Perhaps he had better have waited till you had seen it.'

'Dear Mamma, what could I have known about it? I who have never even been in London! I am sure it was better he should choose. He says Lady Selina Longden considers it perfect.'

It was on the tip of Mrs. Woodroffe's tongue to say that Constance must take care to hold her own, and not allow Lady Selina to interfere overmuch in her household, but she checked herself in time, reflecting that it would be wiser

not to say anything till the marriage was safely over; when it was, she would not fail to urge Constance to 'hold her own.'

The marriage was at length fixed for New Year's Day, and, from the moment it was decided, it seemed to Constance as if the leaden weight at her heart grew heavier and heavier. She struggled with all her might not to think of Colonel Latreille. She had quite convinced her reason, or, at least, she honestly believed that she had, that he had never given her a serious thought; but yet, unbidden, and wholly undesired, would come to her recollection of things that he had said, and, above all, of the tone and of the look which had accompanied them.

She did her best to avoid such thought, and, above all, to forget that Colonel Latreille was to stay at Caenthorpe for the ball, and that she then must meet him. She occupied herself diligently in studying the newspapers, as they contained the only topics on which Mr. Veru-

lam cared to converse, but yet, strive loyally as she might, thoughts of what might have been would recur whenever she was left to herself, and make her wretched with the fear that she was wicked. The thoughts were humiliating too, for, gentle and submissive as she seemed, Constance was in her way very proud, and it was a terrible mortification to her to feel that she had given her love unsought.

Mr. Verulam's chief idea of courtship was to overwhelm Constance with presents, and he very seldom appeared at the Manor without some costly gift, which, while she recognized the wish to please her, and was duly grateful to him for it, made her feel as if each added fresh weight to the chain that bound her to her fate.

Mrs. Woodroffe was never tired of expatiating on his generosity, or of painting to her step-daughter the gay and luxurious future that lay before her, but as yet Constance could take no interest in such topics. She

wore Mr. Verulam's gifts because she felt that not to do so would be ungracious, and she would not willingly have hurt the feelings of her worst enemy, still less of the man she was about to marry; but the bracelets seemed to her like manacles, the necklaces like the collar of a serf, and the rings as if they weighed down her fingers like so much lead.

It was seldom that Mr. Verulam referred in any way to business in Constance's presence. He had utter want of faith in the power of women to understand anything so important, but one day an observation which Mrs. Woodroffe inadvertently let drop struck his attentive ear, and, when next alone with his *fiancée* he said,

'My dear Miss Woodroffe, I have reason to know what importance you attach to a promise, even of the most trivial nature. I want you now to give me one which is really of consequence.'

'What is it?' said Constance.

Mr. Verulam was disappointed. He thought she would have acceded at once.

'I do not think it is anything you can demur to,' he said, rather stiffly. 'It is something for your brother's own benefit.'

Constance knew by his tone that he was annoyed, and said, quickly,

'For Basil's benefit? I am sure I shall be very glad.'

'Perhaps you have heard something of the arrangement which Mr. Woodroffe and I came to, and, in consideration of which, I have set him free from debt?'

'Yes; papa told me, and I was most grateful to you.'

'I explained to your brother that he must not look to me for assistance again.'

'I am sure he ought not to expect it—you have done so much!'

'I am very glad you see it in that light. Set quite free as he now is, his allowance is

ample for all legitimate requirements. But from something Mrs. Woodroffe said on Tuesday, I infer that he by no means thinks so, and that he intends in the future looking to you for help.'

'To me!' Constance exclaimed, in unfeigned astonishment.

She had really forgotten the large sum Mr. Verulam proposed bestowing on her as pin-money.

'Exactly. He is aware of the nature of the settlement I propose making upon you, and is already arranging in his mind how to spend it for you. But I object decidedly to this. What I give my wife I expect her to spend on herself, for her and my pleasure. Besides, as I am sure you must perceive, it is distinctly for your brother's own benefit to be obliged to depend on his own resources.'

'I suppose so,' said Constance, slowly; 'indeed, I am sure you must know best. Only —Basil has always been rather indulged, and

I am afraid he has no great power of self-denial. And don't you think it will seem very hard if I, who am to have so much more than I can by any possibility spend, refuse him any help if he asks it?'

'It may perhaps seem so to him: he is self-indulgent and thinks that the whole world ought to be arranged according to his own convenience. But, as your own sense must tell you, there is no real hardship of which he is entitled to complain; and, as to your inability to spend the money, I hardly think you will find that trouble you. Your life will be very different from what you have hitherto experienced, as I hope to entertain very largely both at Caenthorpe and in London. I hope you will give me your promise.'

Constance hesitated: she wished very much he had not asked this thing of her. It would have seemed a satisfactory use of the wealth, the mere thought of which already oppress-

ed her, to have indulged herself by helping her brother when he required it.

But then the money was Mr. Verulam's, he certainly had a right to some voice as to the method of its expenditure: besides he really had been, as her father had told her, extremely generous to Basil, and he knew the world infinitely better than she did, and was very likely right when he said that her refusal would really be for Basil's own good. And she had refused the first request he had made to her about the concert, and though it had fallen through, and she had therefore not crossed his wishes, it would, she felt, be most ungracious to refuse a second time. So she said:

'I will promise you this: that, if ever he asks for money, I will never give it him without your consent.'

'Thank you, that is all I ask,' he said, bending down to kiss her cheek, as an acknowledgment of her submission.

It was only a few days after this that Mrs. Woodroffe, dilating on all Constance's prospective grandeur, mentioned her pin-money, and 'the great use it would be to poor, dear, ill-used Basil.'

'Don't encourage him to look to me, mamma,' said Constance, flushing hotly; 'Mr. Verulam spoke to me about it the other day, and I promised him never to help Basil without his consent.'

'What?' almost shrieked Mrs. Woodroffe; 'Conny, are you mad or am I? Do you mean that the love of money has taken such hold of you already that you want everything for yourself! I could not have believed it! Of what use could all that money be to you? And it would be everything to Basil.'

'But it is not Basil who is going to marry Mr. Verulam, mamma,' said Constance, with unwonted spirit: 'you know why I consented—that it was to help him and papa. It is Mr. Verulam's money, and he surely has some right

to say how it shall, or, at any rate, how it shall not, be spent. He says I shall not find it too much for what he requires me to do, and—I have promised.'

'Well, but you can always spare something for him.'

'It is not that. Mamma, don't you understand? I have given my word that I will give him *nothing* without Mr. Verulam's leave. I cannot break a promise.'

'Well, Constance, I could not have believed you would be so selfish and cold-hearted.'

'I wish, mamma, you would make Basil understand how I am situated, that it is really no use to apply to me. It was something you said that made Mr. Verulam think he would.'

It was a grievance Mrs. Woodroffe could not get over: she harped upon it incessantly, and was greatly irritated when her husband declared that Mr. Verulam was quite right, and that it was a very good thing for Basil to have no-

thing to rely upon: he was very glad Conny had had the good sense to give the promise.

The party at Caenthorpe assembled on a Monday, the ball being fixed for Tuesday, and the Hunt Ball at Mapleton for Thursday. Mrs. Woodroffe's health was an excuse for there being no party at the Manor, and therefore she, Mr. Woodroffe, and Constance were to dine there on the Monday and Wednesday.

How Constance's heart beat when they drove up to the door on the Monday night! She had half hoped that from some cause or another Colonel Latreille might have failed, but when Mr. Verulam had enumerated his guests on the Saturday he had named him among the rest.

When she entered the drawing-room Constance was far too nervous to see anyone, but she *felt* that he was there. She never knew how she went through the presentation to Lady Selina Longden, who, as she was quite aware,

was Mr. Verulam's *arbiter elegantiarum*, and inclined to be severely critical. Perhaps she underwent the ordeal better than if she had been aware of it, for Lady Selina observed approvingly afterwards that she was wonderfully self-possessed for a girl who had had no advantages, and who had lived entirely in the country.

But the moment came when Colonel Latreille stood beside her, and she found herself shaking hands with him. It would have comforted her unspeakably could she have known how proud and pale she looked; she felt as if she must be scarlet, as if it must be patent to everyone what she was feeling.

She contrived to answer intelligibly Colonel Latreille's few commonplace observations, and then dinner was announced, and she found to her infinite relief that some one else was to take her. If she had had to talk to him all through, she felt she must have broken down.

From where he sat Colonel Latreille could watch her without seeming to do so, and he was startled at the expression of her countenance. In place of the calm sunniness which had been one of its great charms was an expression of pain, of quiet endurance, that perplexed and dismayed him.

Surely she had deliberately chosen this man for his wealth, and, as she had not as yet entered into possession, she could hardly have realised that riches would not bring happiness, or tasted the ashes that lay beneath the fair-seeming rind of the Dead Sea apple. What then could it be? And he meditated so deeply on this problem that his neighbour pronounced him afterwards the very dullest man she had ever had the misfortune to meet.

Constance, meanwhile, had recovered her self-possession, and was beginning to congratulate herself that the meeting she had so

dreaded was over. If only she could escape singing, she felt that she could get through the evening quite creditably.

But it was not to be. Lady Selina said something, intended to be very gracious, but which was really rather patronising, about having heard so much of Constance's singing, and begged her to favour them. For almost the first time in her life, Constance's voice trembled so that she sang false, but she summoned pride to her aid, shut her eyes to Colonel Latreille's presence, and, after the first few bars, acquitted herself most creditably.

'Very nice, very nice indeed,' said Lady Selina, condescendingly; 'do, pray, let us have another.' And Constance, feeling that the one thing she must avoid was pathos, dashed into an Italian bravura that took her audience by storm.

Happily there was another young lady present who professed herself able to accompany, and Constance left it to her to accompany

Colonel Latreille, though he looked at her somewhat wistfully.

Mrs. Woodroffe had been watching them keenly, and was delighted with Constance's behaviour. After all, perhaps, she had alarmed herself unnecessarily, and the girl had never really cared for that tiresome Colonel Latreille. If she had, surely she must have blushed or looked in some way discomposed.

Colonel Latreille was haunted that night by Constance's face. She was, he thought, more lovely than ever, but—why did she look so desperately sad? There could be no reason for her marrying Mr. Verulam excepting her own choice; for, despite Yolande's revelations in the summer, he was far from realising how pressing was the want of money at the Manor.

Had she already discovered her mistake, yet knew not how to free herself? His heart gave a throb at the suggestion, but he put the thought quickly away from him. What

could it signify to him? It was very clear she could never have given him a thought, though he had persuaded himself she had, or else two days after his departure she would not have engaged herself to this pompous millionaire.

He felt he had not been wise in coming; it would have been better if he had sent an excuse; but he only realised now how anxiously he had longed to see her again. It was madness, folly, of course, and he heartily wished he had stayed away, but now he was here he must of course go through with it.

He wondered why she had not chosen one of the songs she had practised so diligently at Ashford—all were prettier than those she had selected; and why should she have left him to the tender mercies of that stupid girl, who quite spoilt his song? And, while these and many other similar thoughts were passing through his brain, Constance was kneeling at her bedside sobbing as if her heart would

break, and praying earnestly for strength and forgetfulness.

To Yolande, Caenthorpe appeared absolute fairyland, when she followed her mother and sister into the great saloon on the night of the ball. The rooms themselves were magnificent, and the splendid conservatories had yielded all their most cherished contents for the embellishment of the house. Mirrors, fountains, and lovely flowers met the eye in every direction, and Yolande felt as if she must pinch herself to be quite sure she was not dreaming.

The beautiful dresses—for everyone had done Caenthorpe the honour of putting on their best toilette, sure that it would be so perfectly lit that everything would be seen—the sparkling diamonds, such as she had never seen before, added to the enchantment of the scene, and she hardly knew that Constance had introduced a partner to her till she found herself walking off with him to take part in the first quadrille.

Mr. Verulam seldom danced, but of course he opened the ball with Constance, who was quite unaware how many envious glances were directed towards her by those who had themselves entertained hopes of occupying the position she did. How willingly she would have changed places with them!

Colonel Latreille sat out the quadrille with Miss Lucy, who felt somewhat indignant with him. If he meant nothing, why had he looked so much, and made, as she feared, an indelible impression on Constance's heart?

Miss Lucy said little, but few things escaped her notice, and she felt tolerably certain that her niece had been overpersuaded to accept Mr. Verulam for Basil's sake, while all the time her heart was given to another. If she had been quite certain of Colonel Latreille's real feelings at the time of the engagement, Miss Lucy might not have been able to resist the temptation to interfere; but she had no such knowledge, and felt she had no right to make

mischief, as she knew the breaking off of this wealthy marriage would be considered, unless she could set everything straight. So she held her peace, but the resignation of the girl's face made her heart ache.

'I hardly expected to be called upon for congratulations in that quarter,' he said, as Mr. Verulam led Constance to the head of the room.

'I daresay not—it was very sudden.'

Miss Lucy felt indignant with him for talking about it. Well, from her he should never discover what she believed to be her niece's secret.

'Miss Woodroffe has not been ill, has she? She seems changed, though, if possible, more beautiful than ever.'

'No, she has been perfectly well. Girls always do look different when they are engaged; of course, there is a great deal of excitement.'

'Humph! I can't fancy old Verulam excit-

ing,' thought Colonel Latreille; but he only said, 'Basil told me first. I was surprised he was so pleased.'

'He has good reason. Mr. Verulam has been most generous,' said Miss Lucy; and then, annoyed with herself for having said so much, she turned away, and began to talk to the lady on her other side.

Colonel Latreille went to claim Yolande for the first valse.

'Well, Miss Yolande, I congratulate you! Do you remember how you longed to come to this ball, but said you should not be allowed?'

'I shouldn't have been if Conny hadn't been engaged. She made a point of it—wasn't it dear of her?'

'I am sure you will enjoy it. Do you know, I was immensely surprised to hear of your sister's engagement?'

'I'm sure I was! It was so sudden. He came over the Saturday she was at Ashford,

and was shut up with papa for ever so long. And then the minute Conny came home mamma said she must see her quite alone, and when she came out after ages she was all white and cold as if she had seen a ghost, and when I spoke she told me she couldn't talk then, though I was dying to hear all about Ashford, and I could hear her in her room sobbing to herself. And then the next day it was all settled, and he gave her the most lovely ring. And papa and mamma were so glad, because Basil had got into trouble and wanted a lot of money, and now Mr. Verulam has set it all straight. I wish he would have done it without marrying Conny, but I suppose he wouldn't. But I wish she would look as she used to—she never smiles now.'

'She has so much to think about.'

'That is what mamma says, but that wouldn't make her sob as she often does at night. She doesn't know I can hear her

through the wall. If she isn't happy, isn't it too bad she should be sacrificed for Basil. But oh! how I chatter! I oughtn't to talk like this.'

'You are quite safe with me.'

'Yes, I know, and somehow I can't help talking to you. Something upset Conny last night; she said she was tired and wouldn't let me into her room, and she sobbed for ever so long. Did anything happen?'

'No, nothing. She sang beautifully.'

'She has grown quite capricious about her songs. Do you remember how beautifully she sang "Robin Adair," and how often she sang it? I don't think she ever missed a day. Well, ever since she came back from Ashford she has never sung it, and is quite vexed if I ask for it.'

Though he did all the duty dances required of him that evening, took innumerable ladies to tea and supper, and looked and talked as

usual, Colonel Latreille knew but little of what was going on around him. His thoughts were all centred on Constance.

Yolande's indiscreet chatter had told him everything. If he had not waited for that ideal Sunday walk that never came to pass, if he had spoken when he first met her at Ashford, she would have been his—he had not been mistaken in thinking she loved him, she had been no coquette. Dolt! idiot! that he had been to let such a treasure escape him!

For the deed was done now. Better far that she should believe that he had trifled with her affections and learn to despise him, than that she should now hear the truth, though he would have given half his fortune to tell her. He knew as well as if he had asked the question that having once given her word Constance would never go back from it; the best he could wish her would be that she

should forget his very existence, although to him she would ever be the one woman in the world,—and the chance of that would certainly not be increased by her knowledge of the truth. It would add to her other trials the bitter thought that would ever haunt him, 'it might have been.'

CHAPTER VI.

Honest company, I thank you all,
That have beheld me give away myself
To this most patient, sweet, and virtuous wife.
Taming of the Shrew. Act 3, Sc. 2.

IN compliance with Constance's very urgent wish, Mr. Verulam had agreed that the marriage should be as quiet as possible. This was a disappointment to him. He was of an ostentatious disposition, and would have liked every action of his life to have been marked with considerable *éclat.* But he was obliged to allow that it was the bride's privilege to settle the style and observances of her own wedding;

after their marriage it would be for him to dictate the amount of state that was requisite.

Lady Selina Longden had remained at Caenthorpe for two or three days after the ball party dispersed, and had seen Constance several times. She was somewhat provoked by Mr. Verulam's choice, having hoped that it would fall on her niece, Georgie De Vere, and she was therefore a merciless critic.

It was impossible, however, for her to find fault with anything in Constance's appearance or manners, so she contented herself with warning the bridegroom-elect that Miss Woodroffe, having been brought up entirely in the country, and apparently in so very quiet a manner, could of course have no knowledge of the etiquette or the necessities of London life, and that he must be very careful indeed about the friends she made: country-bred girls were generally romantic, and terribly prone to rush into desperate intimacies which were usually extremely in-

convenient. It was a good thing she had a sister to go out with her.

'But she is not out yet,' Mr. Verulam remarked: 'she is only just sixteen. Miss Woodroffe begged she might be allowed to come to the ball here as a great treat, but she is not out.'

'I should not mind that, she looks quite eighteen. It is a very good thing for an inexperienced young wife in her first season to have a sister to go out with her; it leaves the husband much more free. He can go where he pleases, and yet be sure that his wife is never alone, and receives no *tête-à-tête* visits.'

'I am sure,' said Mr. Verulam, with a touch of rising displeasure, 'that Miss Woodroffe is entirely to be trusted.'

'I never meant to imply that she was not. But people who have not been brought up in our world, and served the necessary apprenticeship to society, have so little idea of keeping people in their proper place, they allow them

to become intimate, and of course this is so much easier if the visitor finds the lady alone.'

'Doubtless you are right.'

Lady Selina looked up surprised. Could he for one moment have doubted that she necessarily must be?

'Of course,' she continued, 'you will not allow Mrs. Verulam to dance—I was rather surprised to observe that she waltzed the other night: it would, I think, have shown better taste if she had not.'

'She has had very little dancing, and appears fond of it.'

'Exactly! that is the worst of country bringing-up—people not only care about things, but they show it—it is very bad style.'

'Doubtless after her marriage she will give it up.'

'I should not leave it to chance, I should point out to her clearly that it would not be becoming.'

'I am sure she will be grateful for any social information you will be so good as to afford her.'

Lady Selina did not feel by any means certain of it. She loved to domineer, and hoped to hold supreme sway over Mr. Verulam's wealthy *ménage* in Carlton Terrace, but she felt not at all sure that Constance would approve.

'There is another point—her singing. It is beautiful—quite too good for an amateur, in fact. You should allow her voice to be heard very rarely—I should say only at home, perhaps even only at Caenthorpe. If you let her sing much, she will always be besieged for concerts, and I feel sure you would not like her to become a quasi-professional.'

'No, indeed.'

'Well, it is very natural she should like to exhibit such a voice, more especially as she has had so little opportunity of doing so hitherto,

so I should not run the risk of her being asked.'

'I am greatly indebted to you for such good advice.'

'You were very wise in begging she might have no trousseau; it would naturally have been a failure. I will give you the address of Marguerite in Paris, and you had better put Mrs. Verulam unreservedly into her hands. She will exactly understand her style. I suppose you will return in time for the Drawing-room in March?'

'I fully intend it. May I hope you will present my wife?'

'I would with great pleasure, but I am not the proper person. Failing any relatives of your own, you should ask Lady Mapleshire; she is the great lady of your own county. Should she fail you, I will undertake the duty with pleasure.'

It was after Lady Selina had left Caenthorpe

for Ashford that Mr. Verulam began to expound some of her views to Constance.

'I think,' he said, 'you will agree with what I am about to propose, which is that your sister should pass the season with us. She seemed to enjoy herself greatly the other night.'

'She was nearly wild with delight, and thought she was in fairyland,' said Constance, smiling; 'I was so much obliged to you for asking her. But about London—I am afraid she is too young. I don't think mamma would hear of it.'

Mr. Verulam, who never for a single waking moment was abandoned by the consciousness of the power of his money, thought to himself that, if he chose, she must comply with his wishes.

'You would like it?'

'Of course—that is, if it really would not be bad for her.'

'It certainly would not. As Lady Selina remarked the other day, she looks quite eighteen, and it would be a great advantage for you to have a constant companion.'

'Then it was Lady Selina's suggestion?' said Constance, in a disappointed tone.

'It was; I confess, considering your sister's youth, the idea might not have occurred to me. I hope you have not imbibed the prejudice which Mrs. Woodroffe evidently entertains against my friend Lady Selina? She will be of incalculable use to you in directing you how to steer your course in the unknown sea of London life.'

'I have no prejudice,' replied Constance, quietly; 'I shall, I am sure, be very glad of any information which Lady Selina will bestow upon me, and which will enable me to fulfil your wishes. I only regretted that the kind thought of Yolande had not been entirely your own.'

'I am glad to hear what you say respecting

Lady Selina,' said Mr. Verulam; 'your willingness to receive advice confirms me in the very high opinion I have already formed of your good sense. Perhaps this is a good time to tell you of another of her suggestions, which is that after our marriage you should give up dancing altogether. She thought it would have been better taste if you had not valsed the other night, but I assured her the idea had never occurred to you, and she at once acknowledged that of course you were at some disadvantage as to the minute *convenances* of society, owing to your exclusive residence in the country.'

Though she was very gentle, and had the lowest possible estimate of herself, Constance could not help a thrill of indignation at the thought of how she had been canvassed. But she controlled herself, and answered, gently,

'I will give it up, certainly, if *you* wish me to do so. If you had expressed any objection

to my valsing, I am sure you know I should not have done so.'

'I felt sure of it; I told Lady Selina so, and she quite understood the whole state of the case. Pray, my dear Miss Woodroffe, do not for a moment imagine that I am blaming you.'

After this conversation, Constance's heart felt even heavier than it had yet done. The thought that Lady Selina would be ever at hand to criticise her words and actions, and to complain of them to her husband, filled her with dismay.

When first Mrs. Woodroffe had hinted something about Lady Selina taking too much upon her, and requiring to be kept in her place, Constance had paid but little attention to her forebodings, feeling that she knew little or nothing of the London world in which she was about to be launched, and ought to be grateful to anyone who would give her the requisite information; but social help

and direction were one thing, criticism of her to Mr. Verulam was another. She felt that much of it would be more than she could bear, but she lacked the courage to make a stand at once, and tried to hope it might not occur again.

And, even if it did, she must regard it as part of the price which she had to pay for the peace and comfort that had descended on her home. She had only to look at her father to feel recompensed for her sacrifice. Twenty years seemed to have been lifted from Mr. Woodroffe's shoulders; his laugh, which his daughter had not heard for years, now frequently echoed through the house, and he had resumed his long-interrupted habits of intercourse with his neighbours.

He had quite forgotten his first fear that Constance's marriage was a sacrifice. He had been so often and so warmly congratulated on her good fortune, that he had fallen into the general way of looking at the matter,

and considered her a very lucky girl. Verulam was old for her of course, but, after all, if she did not object, that was no one's business. It was an old saying, 'better be an old man's darling, than a young man's slave.' He had never quite understood, by the way, why a young man's wife must of necessity be a slave, but no doubt it was all right—proverbs of course must be—and he really seemed very fond of her; brought her most beautiful presents.

Of course in point of birth he was not her equal, but such marriages took place every day now; it was the fusion of birth and wealth, to their mutual advantage; and certainly Caenthorpe was a magnificent place, and gave its owner a good position in the county. And really it might have been much worse. He was perfectly presentable, and seemed totally free from the objectionable relations by whom self-made men were generally so heavily handicapped. At any rate, if

he possessed them, he seemed to have the discretion to keep them out of sight. So Mr. Woodroffe quite forgot his former scruples, and resigned himself to the unwonted bliss of perfect ease in money matters.

At first Mrs. Woodroffe absolutely refused to hear of the proposition respecting Yolande.

'It was absurd, ridiculous! She was surprised that Mr. Verulam could think of such a thing! She could not hear of her coming out before she was eighteen. It had been against her better judgment that she had allowed her to go to Caenthorpe; she wished now that she had refused!'

But, when all this effervesence was over, Mr. Verulam sat with her for some time alone, and after that little more was heard of Mrs. Woodroffe's objections. What he had said Constance never knew, but it was clear that he had contrived entirely to crush her opposition.

Yolande herself was in the seventh heaven of delight. It was natural that a girl who had never been immured in the school-room, but had lived entirely with her elders, heard their conversation and read their books, should be considerably older than her real age, and Yolande, though very far indeed from being well educated, was probably more advanced in mind than most girls of eighteen. And yet in some things she was as simple as a child.

Though she had been lynx-eyed to perceive what she had believed to be the natural attraction of Constance and Colonel Latreille, yet, when her sister accepted Mr. Verulam, the real truth never presented itself to her mind, in spite of the sobs which she overheard. She took it for granted that she had been mistaken as to her sister's feelings; and, though she did not fancy Constance could be in love with Mr Verulam, it never even occurred to her that she had consented to marry him while loving some one else.

Yolande felt almost in love with her future brother-in-law herself for having compassed anything so delightful as her season in London, and though his cold way of receiving her transports somewhat damped her enthusiasm she felt that his deeds were better than his words. This amply compensated for the quiet wedding which had so grievously disappointed her, and she felt she should count the days till the end of the honeymoon brought his summons to London.

When Mr. Verulam made his appearance at the Manor on the Saturday previous to the wedding day, which was on Tuesday, he was greeted by Mrs. Woodroffe with the exclamation:

'Oh, Mr. Verulam, I am so very sorry but the wedding must be put off!'

'Put off! why? I trust Miss Woodroffe is not ill?'

'Oh no, Conny is all right. It is Basil; he writes to say he cannot possibly come as he in-

tended on Monday, he is asked into Wiltshire for some very good shooting, but he will be free the next week, and so of course it must be put off.'

'I do not agree with you at all,' said Mr. Verulam, very stiffly; 'of course, if Captain Woodroffe chose to be present, I should be delighted to see him, but he is not essential to the ceremony, and I cannot consent to its being postponed.'

'But it will disappoint him so, dear fellow.'

'Hardly, I think, or he would have declined the shooting party.'

'But after all a week would make no difference to you.'

'Pardon me, it would make a great deal; all my arrangements are made and I never allow them to be disturbed. Nothing but Miss Woodroffe's distinctly expressed wishes would induce me to consent to the postponement of our

marriage for her brother's selfish gratification.'

At that moment Constance made her appearance, and Mr. Verulam at once appealed to her.

'Mamma wishes it, I know,' said Constance, colouring; 'but for myself I think, if Basil cares so little about being present as to prefer a few days' shooting, it would be a great pity to disturb all your arrangements. Very likely if it were postponed he would find something he liked better to do the week after.'.

Constance had been deeply hurt by Basil's conduct. When she was stifling the feelings and sacrificing her life to this old man entirely for his sake, it was the least she thought that he could have done to be present at her marriage, even if it lost him a few days' amusement. But he did not choose to deny himself, it was very clear that he cared little or nothing about her, and she felt that it would be posi-

tively wrong that Mr. Verulam, who had behaved so generously to her, should be in a manner set aside for a brother who thought only of his own pleasure.

Mr. Verulam turned to her with marked satisfaction.

'I felt sure you would see the matter in the right light,' he said, approvingly, 'you always do.'

And so, in spite of Mrs. Woodroffe's alternately angry and tearful protests, the wedding took place on the appointed day.

'It is a happy bride on whom the sun shines,' Yolande quoted to her sister, as she superintended her bridal toilette. 'How happy you ought to be, Conny!—it is not often one sees such a brilliant New Year's Day.'

Yolande had an uneasy consciousness that something was wrong, that her darling sister was not happy, and collected all omens of hope and brightness almost as much for the sake of persuading herself that she was mistaken,

and that all was right, as for her sister's edification.

'I don't think we either of us believe much in old sayings,' said Constance, smiling.

'Oh, yes, Conny, we do, especially when they are nice. Oh! I wish you had not insisted on such a quiet wedding—you do look so lovely, I should have liked the whole world to see you.'

'You would have had some difficulty in packing them into the church, child.'

'And look at the lovely bracelet Mr. Verulam has given me—diamonds and pearls.'

Constance was more glad of that bracelet than of all the valuable presents which she had herself received from Mr. Verulam; it had given Yolande such immense pleasure as being her first piece of jewellery.

Her acquaintance was not very large, and her list of presents would have made no very great show in the *Court Journal*, excepting, of course, Mr. Verulam's; but there was one which

had puzzled her greatly, as it had been sent her anonymously. It was a locket, composed of a magnificent sapphire set in a star of large diamonds, and there was nothing in the parcel to give the slightest clue as to whence it came. Even the jeweller's case in which it lay had not the usual name on the lining, and it was evident that the donor wished to remain unknown. Mr. Verulam admired it greatly, though it was somewhat annoying to him to think there was a mystery about anything connected with him or his.

A sudden idea struck Constance when she first opened the parcel that it might be from Colonel Latreille, but she at once put the thought aside as preposterous. He had not even congratulated her when they met at Caenthorpe, which would only have been an ordinary courtesy; it was most improbable that he should send her so magnificent a present, or that, if he had done so, he would send it anonymously.

But though she told herself this, and honestly believed it, she still felt a sentiment about the mysterious trinket, and could not forget that during a discussion of gems at Ashford, on her saying diamonds and sapphires were her favourites, Colonel Latreille had observed that they were those which he also preferred, and that they were symbolical of truth and innocence.

It was a clear and still day, with an intense frost and a dazzling sun, that Constance was married in the little village church. There were no guests; the only spectators besides the village folk, who all adored Constance, were Miss Lucy and young Mr. Longden, who acted as Mr. Verulam's best man, and who was rather annoyed to find that his efforts to relieve the tedium of the proceedings by commencing a flirtation with Yolande were frustrated by her incontrollable grief for the loss of her sister.

Now that it had come to the point that Con-

stance was really about to start, Yolande wept as one refusing to be comforted; even the thought of going to her in London seemed powerless to console her.

At first Mr. Longden took it for granted that this excessive show of grief was assumed for effect—domestic affection and all that sort of thing always looked so well—but Yolande's sorrow was far too real to be at all becoming, and with extreme surprise he was obliged to believe that she was really in earnest.

Lady Selina's cold nature was too accurately reproduced in her son for him to be able to regard such a fact as other than phenomenal: and when he found that, after Constance, resplendent in amaranth velvet and sable, had made her last adieux and been driven away, Yolande, dissolved in tears, disappeared, and was seen no more, he departed for the station, and ruminated, on his way back to London, on how very strange

girls brought up in the country always were, and on how, a year hence, Yolande would laugh at the folly of her exhibition.

The 'Lord Warden,' that first resting-place of so many brides and bridegrooms, was Constance's first stage in her honeymoon. Left entirely alone with Mr. Verulam, without even a chance of interruption, she was appalled to feel how difficult it was to find anything to talk to him about, and he was not a man very greatly to help her. He had the reputation, which was not undeserved, of being a good, nay, at times even a brilliant talker, but he required an audience, or at any rate some one who fully entered into his peculiar topics.

Constance was intelligent enough, but she was timid about giving her opinion, and, when he asserted a fact, was too diffident of her own information to do more than agree, so that conversation naturally languished. She began to think it would be a great re-

lief to move on into new scenes. Surely in France, where everything would be strange to her, she must find it easier to have something to say? Probably something of the same feeling lies at the root of the desire for travel exhibited by most newly-married couples.

Paris is a sight of bewildering gaiety to most people who see it for the first time, but to Constance, whose only idea of a town had been derived from the sleepy city of Mapleton and the hurried drive through the dingy streets between London stations in the rapidly falling dusk, the effect was almost intoxicating.

Mr. Verulam liked to see her pleased, but he was also terribly afraid lest she should show her delight too openly, and thus appear countrified and ignorant of the repose required by society, which was a point so strongly insisted upon by Lady Selina. He could not disguise

that he was bored with their frequent visits to the Louvre, where Constance would have liked to pass the entire day, it being her first delightful introduction to really good pictures.

She on the other hand could hardly understand the pleasure he seemed to take in the theatres, for he was a very imperfect French scholar. She by no means realized that anyone could wish to see things merely to talk about them, and that the *spectacle* or some individual peculiarity of each actor or actress was being registered in her husband's mind, and would be produced at some future time with the effect of causing him to be considered a great authority.

Some of the plays, not unnaturally, shocked her very considerably; but when she ventured to suggest that they 'were not nice,' she met with scant sympathy. Mr. Verulam assured her that everyone went to see them,

and that it was the worst possible taste to affect prudery: he trusted she would never do so.

CHAPTER VII.

To purchase heaven, has gold the power?
Can gold remove the mortal hour?
In life, can love be bought with gold?
Are friendship's pleasures to be sold?

To a Friend. DR. JOHNSON.

IT was a fine afternoon in July, and Constance and her sister were at a large garden party given by the Duchess of Moorshire at her villa on the Thames. Constance's beauty had greatly matured since her marriage, and she had been perhaps more admired than any other beauty of the season, who had not thrust herself determinedly on the public notice as a 'professional.' In a certain way, too, she had

enjoyed her season; the life was absolutely new to her, and it had been a very great pleasure to watch Yolande's enjoyment, but she was beginning to feel inexpressibly weary, and to long for the repose which, however, it was clear from her husband's arrangements that Caenthorpe would not afford her.

Mr. Verulam had imported all the determination and energy which had made him a millionaire into his adoption of fashionable life. He was determined that his wife should have the largest and the most fashionable acquaintance in London, that her balls and concerts should be quoted as the very best of the season, that she should be seen everywhere that she ought to be seen, and nowhere that was not extremely smart and fashionable.

He allowed her no choice whatsoever as to who she should or should not know, referring everything to the decision of Lady Selina Longden, and telling her, when she expressed a wish to cultivate anyone to whom she had

taken a fancy, that it was impossible that she, bred up entirely in the country, could possibly be a judge as to whom it was judicious to know.

He accompanied her everywhere, and constantly interrupted her conversation, if he fancied she was paying unnecessary attention to any socially 'useless' person. Indeed, her conversation was rather a trial to him. Constance talked very well, and as a natural consequence, when she met anyone pleasant, she cordially enjoyed conversation.

Mr. Verulam rather objected to women who had opinions of their own, more especially if they were able to express them fluently enough to interest their audience; in his view it was the place of men to talk of any serious subjects and of women to listen and acquiesce. If they talked at all, it should only be chatter on fashionable or frivolous subjects, while Constance, who had read a great deal, and to whom the possibility of exchanging ideas with

men who had not only read a great deal more than she had, but had many of them been engaged for years in constructing the history of their country, was a new pleasure, loved to talk on all topics of political, social, and general interest, and was generally regarded as an exceptionally intelligent woman.

And to this Mr. Verulam objected. He would have liked to see his wife surrounded because she gave the best dinners and the most magnificent entertainments in London, but not for her intellectual powers. It might put it into her head that she was clever, and, if a woman once imagined herself that, there was naturally, he believed, an end to all happiness in her home.

In real truth, he liked to be himself the prominent figure. He was not what is commonly understood by the word jealous, indeed he was infinitely too well satisfied with himself for such a feeling to be possible to him, but he did not like his wife to be made

the first object with anyone, and so to distract attention from himself. And he thought that when he was speaking, which it must be conceded he generally did extremely well, that her proper attitude was to listen dutifully to him instead of talking to others. He never found fault with her on this score, or indeed said anything about it, but he assumed an aggrieved air, and it was not long before Yolande fathomed what this implied.

Yolande was infinitely shrewder and more clear-sighted than was her sister, although she was by no means so clever. But she had the power, somewhat singular in one so young, of generally seeing both things and people as they really were, instead of as Constance's gentleness and amiability made her believe them to be. The way in which Mr. Verulam dictated to Constance, never allowing her a choice in even so small a matter as her own dress, aroused her bitterest indignation.

But she was more discreet than could have

been anticipated. The fortnight which it took her to understand her brother-in-law taught her many other things. She saw that her sister was very far indeed from being happy, but she understood almost at once that to let her guess her discovery would give Constance exquisite pain: she would be sure to blame herself, and think she had done something wrong in allowing her secret to escape her.

'As if she could blind me!' Yolande said to herself. 'Darling Conny! so good and perfect as she is, to be thrown away on that stiff, purse-proud man just because Basil was extravagant and he had the mortgages! Oh, it is disgraceful! Why should we women always be sacrificed to our male belongings? It is they who do the wrong and have all the pleasure they can abstract from it, but it is we who suffer, and they seem to think that is all just as it should be.'

Shortly after their arrival in London, the sisters while out driving had met Colonel

Latreille, and, being unprepared to see him, Constance had been betrayed into a vivid blush, made infinitely deeper by her annoyance at colouring at all, and Yolande had noticed the circumstance and, after profound meditation, had arrived at a tolerable comprehension of the state of the case.

How she wished she had not talked so unreservedly to Colonel Latreille at the Caenthorpe ball! What must he have thought! And involuntarily she had lowered Constance's dignity by mentioning the sobs which she now shrewdly suspected might be placed to his account.

In most respects Yolande had always been old of her age: a very short experience of London was to her as a revelation, and she became a very shrewd judge of character. She read Mr. Verulam like a book, and had the keen contempt which is only felt by the very young for the weaknesses of his character. There is no such Rhadamanthine judge as an

innocent but clear-sighted young girl: as people grow older and learn more of the world, they become infinitely more tolerant of the weaknesses and failings of their fellow-creatures.

It must be confessed that Mr. Verulam was a somewhat trying person to live with. The dignified pomposity which did not sit badly upon him in public was never for a single moment laid aside; he could by no means understand a flight of fancy or a playful way of putting things, and always proceeded to argue upon them with infinite gravity and a profusion of platitudes. He estimated his acquaintance entirely by their rank and standing in the world, and not only himself preferred, but expected his wife to show a marked preference for, the dullest person possessed of a title over the most agreeable companion equally well-born but destitute of that magic endowment.

As Yolande confided to Ross the Skye who,

having been transferred to her, lived in her room, and who was the chief recipient of her opinions, perhaps it was not surprising. He had probably never seen a lord while he was busy as 'the architect of his own fortune,' and was now enjoying the society of the peerage with all the charm of novelty.

Perhaps Yolande might not have been inclined to be so severe on this point, if Mr. Verulam had not made it clear to her that there was an especial peer whom he wished her to receive favourably.

Lord Bracton was a young earl whose father had died when he was three years old, and whose long minority had resulted in an immense accumulation of ready money. His mother was a sister of Lady Selina Longden and Lady Louisa De Vere, and was therefore well known to Mr. Verulam. The young man, who was about four and twenty, was best described by negatives. He was neither tall nor short, neither dark nor fair, neither really

clever nor positively stupid, neither amiable nor the reverse, neither dissipated nor very steady. In short, he was a young man such as may be met by the dozen every day, and if he had not been Earl of Bracton, and one of the richest peers in England, no one would ever have troubled themselves to give him a second thought.

As it was, he was sought after and *fêted* in a manner that was excessively bad for him, and which gave him, not unnaturally, a very poor opinion of women. He had had it made so abundantly clear to him that he had but to ask and have, that he naturally believed that, no matter where he threw the handkerchief, it would be received with infinite gratitude; and the first thing that made him remark Yolande was her forgetting her engagement to dance with him. He could hardly believe his eyes when he saw her dancing with some one else; it was not even as if he had kept her waiting, though he was well accustomed to be received with grate-

ful smiles even if he sauntered up when a valse was half over;—but now it was only beginning.

No—marvellous as it appeared, it was clear she had absolutely forgotten all about him, and the shock of surprise made him think about her a great deal more than he would otherwise have done. And her subsequent conduct piqued him, and kept up his interest. Yolande never thought about him at all, and treated him precisely like the general run of her partners; it was quite evident, he felt with an immense surprise, that there were several with whom she was more intimate, and whom she seemed to prefer.

In fact he neither amused nor interested Yolande, and it never occurred to her to pretend to like anyone more than she really did, or that Lord Bracton's position, which had been explained to her with scrupulous care by her brother-in-law, constituted any reason why she should pay him any particular attention.

Constance was not blind to the fact that Lord Bracton was evidently attracted by her sister, but she said nothing to Yolande. If her influence could achieve it, the girl should be left perfectly free to choose her own fate in life; her feelings were so deep and strong that a loveless marriage would to her mean absolute misery, and Constance sighed as she could not suppress a thought of her own blighted life. Well, thank God it was she who had been called upon to make the sacrifice, and Yolande was free from that peril; *she* could not be required to do anything for Basil.

Since Constance had lived more in the world, and had heard and seen more of her brother and his friends, she had learnt that all Basil's troubles came from his own self-indulgence and extravagance, and that Yolande, child as she was, had been far more discriminating in her judgment of him than had Mrs. Woodroffe. She was still thankful for the relief and peace

which she had insured to her father, but, knowing as much as she now did, she would not have sacrificed herself and her hopes, slight as they might have been of happiness, for Basil's sake.

Immediately on her arrival in London, he had asked her for money, and on her reminding him of her promise to Mr. Verulam, of which Mrs. Woodroffe had informed him at her request, he had replied that of course that was all nonsense, she could give him the twenty-five pounds he wanted without her husband being any the wiser.

'But you do not seem to understand, Basil. I gave Mr. Verulam my word not to do so.'

'What does that matter so long as he doesn't know?'

'I do not give my word and then break it.'

'Oh, nonsense! Of course that's all right among men, but women are different.

No one ever expects a woman to keep a promise.'

'Really? Well, when I make one I keep it.'

'And you mean to say you won't help me? Then where on earth was the use of your marrying a cad like Verulam?'

'It has been of use enough to you at any rate,' said Constance, with dignity: 'I know all Mr. Verulam did for you, and wonder you are not ashamed of being so greedy as to ask for more. I have already told you that my word is given and that I will not break it. And pray remember that Mr. Verulam is my husband, and that if you speak of him to me at all you must speak respectfully.'

Basil laughed.

'I must say you didn't do that badly. It would be splendid before an audience, but it's rather thrown away on me. Of course everyone knows you can't care two straws about him.'

'He has been very generous to me and mine, and I mean what I say,' answered Constance, proudly: 'if you want his money you must ask him for it yourself.'

'The selfishness of women is something amazing,' observed Basil, lazily: 'the idea of you, who never had a shilling to call your own, spending £2,000 a year on yourself! However, if you're obstinate on the subject, there's nothing more to be said.'

It was some time after Constance first observed Lord Bracton's predilection for her sister, before Mr. Verualm said anything to her on the subject. At length about the middle of June he observed:

'I wish you to have Lord Bracton here as much as possible. I think it is clear that he has taken a fancy to your sister.'

'I do not think she cares for him in the least.'

'Possibly not. She is almost too young to know her own mind. But he is not

a man that any girl in her senses could refuse.'

'I assure you Yolande would if she did not love him.'

'I can hardly believe she could be so extremely foolish. But if you think so it is your duty to make her see the matter in the right light. Lord Bracton's wife will be one of the richest and most important women in England.'

'That would not weigh with Yolande in the least. She will never marry unless it is with her whole heart. And surely there is no need for haste; consider what a child she is, not yet seventeen.'

'Great opportunities do not come every day,' said Mr. Verulam, sententiously: 'if Yolande is so foolish as not to accept such a position when it comes in her way, she is far from likely ever to have such another offered to her. I wish you to point this out to her very clearly; it would be a magnificent alliance,

and one which would be most agreeable to me.'

'If she dislikes the idea, I cannot urge it upon her.'

'Have you any reason to suppose that she dislikes Lord Bracton?'

'No, but I think she is perfectly indifferent to him.'

'Do you imagine she cares for anyone else?'

'No,'—but Constance's tone was less confident.

She had no absolute certainty, but she had more than once fancied that there seemed a mutual attraction between Yolande and Sir Armine Haverton.

'Then there is no reason why she should not learn to like Bracton. I rely, Constance, on your doing everything in your power. Remember, and if necessary do not let Yolande forget, that she is absolutely without fortune. Your father was unable to settle anything at

the time of his second marriage, and at his death she will be penniless.'

'But she could always live with me,' cried Constance, with infinite pain in her voice.

'Of course *I* might invite her to remain with us. But you must allow that I am in no way compelled to do so, and that disregard of my express wishes is hardly the way to make me desire her presence as an inmate.'

'I will see what I can do,' said Constance, though she cordially disliked the task, and had a prevision that it would be unsuccessful.

Yolande opened her eyes in amazement when her sister referred to the subject.

'Lord Bracton! Conny dear, you must be dreaming! Why, I'm always affronting him by not paying him enough attention! I'm sure he never once thought of such a thing!'

'I think he has, dear, and—so does Mr. Verulam.'

'Mr. Verulam!' Yolande exclaimed in surprise. 'What can he know about it?'

'He—he thinks as I do, and—he is very anxious that you should give Lord Bracton a favourable answer.'

'What possible business can it be of his?' with a disdainful toss of her head.

'Lord Bracton could give you a splendid position. There has never been anything said against him; he is pleasant, and considered good-tempered.'

'*Après?* He is very dull, and overwhelmed with the idea of his own importance.'

'Do you dislike him, Yolande?'

'Not at present; for I have never taken the trouble to think about him, but I very soon shall, if he is forced upon me.'

'There is one thing that Mr. Verulam desired me to tell you,' said Constance, colouring and hesitating. 'I daresay that

he is right, and that you ought to know it. It is that you have no fortune whatsoever. It appears papa could settle nothing.'

'I am glad to know that,' said Yolande, after a long pause. 'Not that it makes any difference to what I say about Lord Bracton. It would never do, Conny. I am not good, and gentle, and amiable like you; I should do something dreadful, if I married a man I didn't love with all my heart.'

Constance fully believed it, and she said no more. She told her husband that Yolande refused to think of Lord Bracton, but he was by no means turned from his purpose, and insisted on having the young man constantly at the house. At times Constance could hardly repress a smile at the ingenuity which Yolande displayed in avoiding him, but it annoyed Mr. Verulam, and he often spoke bitterly on the subject, declaring that his wife could do more, if she only tried.

On this afternoon, at the Duchess of Moorshire's, Constance, who was not very strong, was sitting in the shade of a fine cedar, and watching Yolande, who was walking up and down with Sir Armine Haverton. She was daily growing more certain that they cared for each other, and regretted it; for Sir Armine was very poor, and, though Constance was as little mercenary as a woman well could be, she yet did not wish her bright little sister to marry without the possibility of at least decent comfort.

And yet she scarcely knew how to warn Yolande. The girl was so romantic that she sadly feared love would blind her to the recollection that she had fretted at poverty at the Manor, infinitely less galling than must be hers if she married Sir Armine. She was absorbed in these reflections when Lord Bracton seated himself at her side. For some minutes he said little or nothing; his eyes fixed upon Yolande, and his brow clouding

as he saw how merrily she was talking to her companion. At length he said, abruptly,

'Mrs. Verulam, do you think there is any hope for me?'

It was the first time he had said anything on the subject to Constance, and she felt somewhat embarrassed. Before she could reply he went on:

'Is she engaged to that conceited fellow she is walking with?'

'No,' said Constance, glad of a question she could answer positively.

'You are sure? She seems always to be so unapproachable, I can never get her to walk up and down with me like that. Mrs. Verulam, I want you all to come and stay for ten days with me at Bracton. Will you come on the 1st of August?'

'I should like it very much, but I cannot answer positively without consulting Mr. Verulam.'

'Oh, then it is all right; I asked him just now, and he referred me to you. There are to be two balls, which may be an attraction to your sister.'

He lingered by her side under the trees, till Constance saw Mr. Verulam approaching, and beckoned to Yolande; she knew her husband would be pleased if he found her and Lord Bracton in each other's company.

'I'm so awfully glad,' he said; 'your sister has just been promising to bring you to Bracton in August.'

'She has no right to promise and vow for me; she is not my god-mother,' said Yolande, lightly.

'Yolande, dear!' said Constance, in a pained voice, and Yolande knew she had been flippant, and gave her a penitent look.

'August!—I shall be back in Mapleshire then.'

'No, you are to come with us to Bracton for ten days,' said Constance; 'and, Yolande,

you will be glad to hear there are to be two balls.'

'I think I am getting *blasée* about balls, I have had so many lately.'

'I can promise you one thing that will be new to you,' said Lord Bracton; 'you said the other day that you had never yachted, and would give worlds to feel what the sea was like, and I will order my yacht, the *Sea Sprite*, round from Cowes.'

'Pray don't do it for me,' said Yolande, coldly, though for a moment her eyes had danced and sparkled at the suggestion. 'I have no doubt I should prove a wretched sailor, and am sure I should be afraid to try.'

'The *Sea Sprite* shall be there, in hopes that you may change your mind,' he said, quietly, but he was evidently disappointed.

When Mr. Verulam proclaimed it time to go, Lord Bracton walked by Yolande's side to the carriage. He did not say a great deal to her,

nor did he obtain much response to what he did say; but he had, at any rate, the satisfaction of preventing her from being escorted by Sir Armine, who was evidently hanging about for that express purpose.

'I don't want to go to Bracton,' said Yolande, almost crossly, to her sister that night —'you know I don't, Conny; can't you get me off?'

'No, dear, I think not. You know we have accepted, and Mr. Verulam would be vexed.'

'I am not bound to consult his fancies.'

'But you will do it for my sake,' said Constance, laying her hand on her sister's arm; and Yolande felt that there was nothing, save, indeed, in the absolute matter of marriage, that she would not do for Constance.

She was even more civil to Lord Bracton for the next few days, raising his hopes to fever heat, and making Mr. Verulam believe that she was more sensible than his wife supposed. If she was yielding now, it was pretty certain

that after she had seen Bracton, which was universally allowed to be one of the finest places in England, she would be unable to resist the temptation of becoming its mistress.

CHAPTER VIII.

Hast thou seen that lordly castle,
  That castle by the sea?
Golden and red above it
  The clouds float gorgeously.

And fain it would stoop downward
  To the mirrored wave below;
And fain it would soar upward
  In the evening's crimson glow.

From the German of Uhland. LONGFELLOW.

BRACTON CASTLE deserved the description which Mr. Verulam had given of it as one of the finest places in England. Part of it was a ruin, built on the extreme verge of a tall cliff overhanging the sea; and, so well had the present earl's grandfather adapted the modern

castle to its surroundings, that it was difficult, without a very close inspection, to say where the old masonry ended and the new began. Indeed some of the old walls had been utilised, being found to be in a state of perfect preservation. Thus the grand saloon was half in the old part of the building and half in the new, a large window having been opened in the old wall overhanging the cliff, and guests often averred it made them giddy even to stand at this window, so sheer was the fall to the water below.

The castle was situated on a headland forming one of the horns enclosing Bracton Bay; the opposite point was far less rugged, and whereas the northern rock on which the castle stood was black and the cliffs abrupt, the southern was of softer red sandstone, and on its inner curve clothed with luxuriant vegetation. The mouth of the bay between the headlands was very narrow, but it expanded into a large basin more than two miles in depth, and at its land-

ward extremity lay the town of Bracton, a port of considerable importance to which no small portion of Lord Bracton's wealth was owing.

The view from the castle looking landwards was very beautiful. The cliffs were extremely high along the coast, and the land sloped gradually downwards from them, thus affording shelter from the prevailing sea breezes to the fine oaks, glades of which formed a great feature in the extensive park. Further inland the ground rose in soft wooded hills, and the background was formed by a distant range of mountains.

When Mr. and Mrs. Verulam and Yolande reached the castle it was an extremely lovely evening. The sun was sinking slowly towards the sea, throwing long shadows of the oaks on the smooth turf, where the deer were tranquilly reposing, and gilding the battlements of the castle in the most picturesque manner.

They were received with stately courtesy by Lady Bracton, an extremely handsome and somewhat formidable lady, who had never left Bracton since her husband's death, and who regarded all the innovations of modern times, and the changes from the manners of her own youth, with a sort of pious horror.

Probably among the guests with whom her son frequently filled the castle had been some specimens of the fast school, which had caused her to regard with apprehension the style of girl he might eventually present to her as a daughter-in-law: at any rate, Constance observed that she scrutinised Yolande very closely on their first arrival, and seemed to watch her narrowly during the whole evening.

The first person to greet Constance when she entered the drawing-room before dinner was Colonel Latreille. Surprise made her colour, and the fact that she accidentally at the moment caught her husband's eye caused the blush to deepen, though why she could not

have told. She felt almost sorry when she found that the colonel was to take her in to dinner; they had met frequently in London, but he had studiously avoided any opportunity of talking to her beyond the few words customary in a crowded assembly, and she felt involuntarily that the attitude which he had assumed was the safest for her. But she soon found herself yielding to the spell of the voice she had loved so well, and enjoying herself as she had not done since the days of her visit at Ashford.

It certainly was not that Colonel Latreille said anything to recall reminiscences of that happy time. He had fully realized the peril of her society to himself; and also, having gathered from Yolande's inadvertent revelations the reason of her marriage, he felt tolerably sure that he had not deceived himself, that she had really loved him, and that his delay for the sake of what he now characterized as a romantic absurdity, an ideal moment that would very

probably never have been realized, had wrecked both their lives.

For his eyes, sharpened by the love that he could not uproot, saw clearly enough that Constance was far from happy; that, calm and composed as she looked, there was an unsatisfied longing at her heart, and that wealth to her was of little value as compared with love.

So he had avoided her as much in the loyal wish for her peace as in the desire for his own, and if he had known that she was engaged to Bracton would have declined his host's invitation. But being there, and finding her assigned to him at dinner, he could not choose but talk pleasantly, though he carefully avoided the slightest reference to their former acquaintance.

But, calm and quiet as was their conversation, Constance was so evidently interested, and involuntarily looked so much brighter and more like her old self than was her wont, that Mr.

Verulam remarked it, and was far from well pleased.

He had not the remotest idea of being jealous; it would have taken a great deal to persuade him that his wife was not supremely thankful for the good fortune that had induced him to select her. But he never liked to see her seem pleased with the conversation of any other man; he had a sort of idea that she ought only to be interested in what *he* said, and never since their marriage had he seen her display so much animation.

Besides he had observed the blush with which Constance had met Colonel Latreille, and, though it had never even occurred to him that she had ever been in love with him, he was annoyed that his wife should have been capable of such a *gaucherie* as to show a sign of disturbance at meeting an old friend. She was *his* wife, and everyone and everything else ought to be absolutely indifferent to her.

'You keep up your singing, I hope,' he heard Colonel Latreille say in a pause of the general conversation.

'Yes, a little.'

'I cannot tell you how I look forward to hearing you again.'

'I am sorry to disappoint you, but I only sing at home.'

'Do you mean that no one ever hears you? It is cruel of you to hide such a light as yours under a bushel.'

'It is not my fault; you know it is always a pleasure to me to sing, especially if people wish it, but Mr. Verulam does not like it.'

'It is surely hard that, because he does not care for music himself, he should deprive others of so great a pleasure.'

'I shall like you to hear Yolande. Good teaching has improved her wonderfully—it is a splendid voice.'

'I always thought it would be. Still it will not repay me for not hearing you again.'

At this moment Lady Bracton gave the signal, and the ladies withdrew.

Colonel Latreille sat silent, meditating on Constance. Ah! why had he so foolishly delayed? He felt himself guilty of her unhappiness as well as his own. He glanced across the table to where Mr. Verulam sat, serene and self-satisfied, laying down the law in well-turned phrases uttered in sonorous tones, and thought how intolerably irksome a pompous and dictatorial man of his type must be to the gentle and refined Constance. And it was evident too that he was jealous, else why should he forbid her to sing? Of course it could be only that he might prevent her from receiving the admiration that was her due, and he despised the meanness of soul that could prompt such conduct.

Ah! if he had been happy enough to call her his, how proud he would have felt of every mark of admiration she had received! Well, it was too late to think of that. He had lost

her, partly through his own insane folly, and now all he could do was carefully to abstain from any conduct that could arouse the demon of jealousy in her husband. He should never forgive himself if any act of his rendered her lot harder to bear than it evidently was already.

As he sat in this silent abstraction, Mr. Verulam's eyes were frequently fixed upon him. Something Lady Louisa De Vere had said at the time of the concert had made him think that Colonel Latreille was inclined to fall in love with Constance; was it possible that her marriage had not opened his eyes to the fact that she had never given him a thought? He must be on his guard—ever on the watch.

Like the majority of those who rise from a lower sphere, Mr. Verulam, while worshipping rank and ancestry, entertained the worst possible opinion of those in the classes above him. If he had not himself risen to wealth and im-

portance, he would have been a Radical, ready to attribute sweepingly to the whole aristocracy laxity of morals and general disregard of right, and though he was, owing to circumstances, a Conservative, and in his anxiety to veil his own precise origin spoke slightingly of the principles of the lower orders, such was still privately his belief.

In his own class he had hardly learnt the meaning of the honour which is the touchstone of an English gentleman, and would hardly have believed that Colonel Latreille was already meditating departure from Bracton, lest his presence, by annoying her husband, should give Constance a moment's discomfort.

It could hardly be said that he distrusted his wife, though his reason was scarcely a flattering one. It seemed to him impossible that anyone, encompassed with luxury like Constance, with no wish, as he believed, ungratified, profusely supplied with money, and, above all, with the jewels that, in his opinion,

were the only things on which women's hearts were really set, could ever contemplate a word or an action that would endanger her position.

One of his favourite axioms was, 'Nothing is ever done without a motive,' and he could imagine none sufficiently strong to induce his wife to do anything that might displease him. Constance's unvarying submission to his slightest wish never struck him as the slightest proof of her amiability; his mind was of an essentially coarse fibre, and he conceived that the reason she so implicitly obeyed him was her fear that if she did not he might restrict her pleasures, or bestow no more jewels upon her.

He had a supreme contempt for romance, and was, as he himself believed, quite satisfied with their calm relations with each other. No doubt a demonstratively loving wife would have proved very irksome to one of his phlegmatic temperament; still, at times, he

was conscious of a certain exasperation at Constance's calm coolness, of a desire for some token that she felt towards him as wives should towards their husbands.

Surely all he had done for her was enough to make her love him? He had taken her away from a home where she had known nothing but dulness and poverty, and had given her everything that the heart of woman could desire: diamonds, dress, luxury, admiration, amusement. And yet she seemed as coolly composed, as absolutely insensible, as she had done before their marriage! It surely showed base ingratitude. Mr. Verulam had never realised the truth that there is one thing that cannot be bought, and that that is—love.

There was no music that evening. Dinner had been very late, and Lady Bracton liked to retire early. When Mr. Verulam went to his wife's room, he said, coldly,

'I am sorry to find that my wishes respect-

ing your singing are irksome to you, and that you regret not being able to emulate the performances of hired singers. Still, knowing my wishes, I should have thought you might have had the good taste not to parade your disappointed vanity.'

'I was not aware that I did,' said Constance, calmly.

'I could not avoid hearing what you said on the subject to Colonel Latreille, when he seemed to assume that your voice was as much at his disposal as if you were a concert singer. This is the misfortune of your having been allowed to make an exhibition of it as you did at Ashford, it encourages impertinence.'

'Colonel Latreille was not impertinent.'

'I think differently, and it is my wish that you should keep him at as great a distance as possible. Do you hear me?' as she made no reply.

'Certainly,' she answered, wearily, 'but I

did not know that you required an answer. Have I ever failed to obey any expressed wish of yours?'

He could not say that she had, and the consciousness irritated him.

'Oh no! you are very dutiful,' he said, bitterly. 'It is a pity you should not show a little affection as well as obedience.'

'You knew before we married that that could never be. You were warned,' said Constance, quietly.

He started.

'Warned before we married! What do you mean?'

'You cannot surely have forgotten,' said Constance, surprised. 'It was the—the day all was settled. I wanted to tell you myself, but mamma said it would come better from her, and she saw you before you came to me.'

'And what is it that you suppose she told me?'

Constance looked astonished.

'Surely you do not wish me to repeat it? It was not pleasant, but it was right, and only honest that you should know, and I would not have married you without.'

'Never mind; let me hear.'

'I was only'—Constance spoke coldly, for she resented being obliged to repeat what was painful—'only that you must thoroughly understand that there could never be any question of love between us. That if, on knowing this, you still wished it, I would marry you, and be your dutiful and obedient wife in gratitude for all you had done for papa and Basil.'

'Is that true? Is that what you believed Mrs. Woodroffe said to me?'

He watched her closely as she replied, but her countenance left no doubt of her sincerity.

'Of course. And she told me you quite understood, and were perfectly satisfied.'

'Well, at any rate, you were straightforward, and she was not. She told me nothing of the kind, or I should hardly have been so "perfectly satisfied." Then, as you were so certain of the impossibility of ever loving me, it is fair to conclude you knew what love was—for some one else.'

'You have no right to ask me that,' said Constance, calmly, but blushing scarlet.

'At any rate, I have no need; the story is written pretty clearly before me;' and he disappeared into his dressing-room.

It was long before sleep visited Constance's eyes that night. All the sorrow of the time previous to her marriage had revived, and, strive as she would, she could not banish the thought of Bernard Latreille and the might have been. What an unfortunate coincidence that he should have been at Bracton at the same time that she was!

She had hoped that she had conquered and put away from her all memory of the hopes

she had once cherished, but the tone of his voice, the soft deference of his manner, had set the wound aching again as keenly as ever. Then, too, Mr. Verulam's assertion that Mrs. Woodroffe had not given her message distressed her beyond measure. She knew him to be scrupulously truthful, and never for a moment doubted his assertion. Oh! why had her stepmother done this thing? He had said he 'would not have been perfectly satisfied.' Then he would not have married her—she should have been free! and her heart leaped at the thought that, if she were so, she might be happy with Bernard Latreille.

But, with a shudder, she put the thought away from her. Situated as she was, it was a sin; she must never allow her mind to dwell for a moment on what might have been. Rather she must fix her thoughts on Mr Verulam's generosity, and remember the weight of care which he had lifted from her father's shoulders. At length, worn out

with mingled emotions, she fell into a restless sleep.

Lord Bracton had announced in the evening that, if fine, the next day was to be devoted to yachting, and, as the morning was lovely, shortly after breakfast those who meant to sail sauntered down to the landing-place where the boats awaited them.

Constance would gladly have been excused, for her disturbed slumbers had caused her to rise very weary and with a bad headache; but she heard Colonel Latreille say he was sorry he must decline, as he had to go into Bracton, and felt that, if she remained at home, she might possibly find herself *tête-à-tête* with him, which was of all things what she least wished. Besides, Yolande clung to her as a defence against Lord Bracton, whose intentions were now quite unmistakable.

The *Sea Sprite* lay close under the cliffs below the castle, within the headland, where there was smooth water in the wildest storm.

She was a fine yacht of nearly three hundred tons, perfect in every respect, and luxuriously fitted up. Yolande was greatly interested, and was delighted to explore every part of the vessel, though she would not move without Constance, evidently fearing to find herself alone with her host.

Yolande's heart was no longer in her own keeping; she had given it unreservedly to Sir Armine Haverton, and firmly believed that he loved her, though no words had as yet passed between them. She knew that he was poor, and she had lately learnt that she was penniless, but to a girl not yet seventeen such obstacles to the course of true love do not seem so insurmountable as after the acquisition of a few more years' worldly experience.

Sir Armine was hardly so happy. He was desperately in love with Yolande; he could not bear the thought of life without her; he felt sure she cared for him, but the remembrance of his poverty always rose like a bar-

rier between them. How could he ask a girl accustomed to the luxuries of Caenthorpe and Carlton Terrace to share the few hundreds which were all he could call his own? He knew nothing of the privations of the Manor, and, with the rapidity of youth to discard disagreeable thoughts, Yolande had forgotten them, or, at least, never recalled to mind how irksome she had found the strict economy which at home she had been called upon to practise.

No thought of the position she would hold as Lord Bracton's wife made her pause, or even think of being unfaithful to her own unspoken love. Hers was a fervent nature; she firmly believed that she could never love but once, and regarded a loveless marriage as an utter impossibility.

It was an ideal yachting day for fair-weather sailors, soft and warm with breeze sufficient to fill the sails and waft the *Sea Sprite* on her course, yet not enough to pro-

duce any sensible motion or to disturb the equanimity of the most delicate. The course taken was to the south, as it was intended to picnic on an island where Lord Bracton had a lodge for sea-bird shooting, and, as they passed the sandstone headland, Yolande exclaimed that she saw a cave.

'Yes, it is one of our sights—we must make an expedition there,' said Lord Bracton; 'unfortunately it is only possible for really good walkers possessed of steady heads.'

'I shall like it of all things. Do you know I have never seen a cave.'

'I am delighted to have anything to show you, but you must not expect too much. It is nothing very wonderful; you must not expect a Peak cavern.'

'It appears to me,' said Yolande, leaning back luxuriously in her well-cushioned deck chair; 'that I have never seen anything. Yesterday I made my first acquaintance with rocks and with the sea, to-day with a yacht,

to-morrow perhaps with a cave. I shall be quite bewildered; new sensations are pressing upon me too fast.'

'As long as you let me introduce you to them, I am happy,' said Lord Bracton, in a low voice, bending towards her.

Yolande coloured and made no reply. She felt half inclined to encourage him, to get the question which it was clear that he meant to ask over and done with,—when it was, they would both be more comfortable. But she was too honourable to do so—even to shorten a disagreeable time, she could do nothing that could entitle him to say she had misled him as to her feelings.

'We will not try the cave to-morrow,' he said, after a pause; 'it is a tiring expedition, and it is the night of the ball at Bracton. It would never do to have any of the party tired.'

'What a splendid room the saloon would be for a ball,' said Yolande, carelessly.

'Do you think so?' he said, eagerly, 'I don't see why we shouldn't have one if you would like it. All the houses in the neighbourhood are full now. I'll speak to my mother to-night.'

'Not for me, pray,' said Yolande, very seriously discomposed; 'I should not have said it. I really do not care about it, I don't think it would do at all.'

'I think it will be delightful,' he said, aloud, and then stooping down he whispered, 'surely you must know what a pleasure it is to me when you will express a wish. I would do anything in the world to please you.'

'Except leave me alone,' Yolande thought, and would dearly have liked to say. But at that moment they cast anchor, and in the bustle attendant on landing she contrived to slip away from him, and attach herself to two girls with whom she afterwards set off to explore the island before he was free from seeing all his friends safely disembarked.

And during the whole afternoon and the return voyage, made quickly with a rapidly freshening breeze, she contrived to keep him at a safe distance, while she was surrounded by others. Lord Bracton returned from his cruise more desperately in love than ever.

CHAPTER IX.

It was a night of summer, yet the wind
  Had wafted from God's wastes the rain-clouds dank,
Blown out heaven's thousand eyes and left it blind,
Though now and then the moon gleamed moist behind
  The rack, till, smitten by the drift, she sank.
                But the Deep roared;
Sucked to the black clouds, spumed the foam-flecked main,
  While lightning rent the storm-rack like a sword,
And earthward rolled the grey smoke of the rain.

The Storm. ROBERT BUCHANAN.

CONSTANCE was much surprised on entering the ball-room at Bracton to find herself greeted by Sir Armine Haverton.

'I did not know you were coming to stay in the neighbourhood,' she could not help saying.

'I only came down this evening for the ball, but Mrs. Mottram has just asked me to go and stay with them at Everhill. She tells me you are to have a ball at the castle.'

'Yes, Lord Bracton caught up something Yolande said, and persuaded his mother to send out invitations.'

'I suppose her word is law to him,' said Sir Armine, wistfully. 'Mrs. Verulam, I've never said anything to you about it before, but I'm sure you must know how it is with me. Sometimes I wish I had never seen her.'

'Yolande?'

'Yes. I was never really in love with anyone before, and I can never care for anyone else. Sometimes I think she cares for me, but how can I ever ask her? What right have I to bind a beautiful young creature like she is to absolute poverty?'

'Wealth does not insure happiness,' said Constance, much embarrassed, and falling back upon a platitude.

She hardly knew what it was best to say. She certainly believed that Yolande loved Sir Armine, but nothing had ever passed between them on the subject; and, far from worldly as she was, she yet thought Yolande too young to be competent as yet to decide whether she cared enough for her lover to be able to face a life of struggle and privation for his sake.

No one knew better than she did that riches did not insure happiness, but yet she shrank from seeing her bright young sister weighed down and rendered spiritless and wretched by the cares inseparable from poverty. Then, too, there was her husband: he would, she knew, vehemently disapprove of Sir Armine's suit, and be extremely annoyed if she encouraged it, even if he had not given her his express commands to exert her influence in favour of Lord Bracton.

She felt that it was useless to speak to Yolande in his behalf, none of the precepts of

worldly wisdom which Mr. Verulam considered so unanswerable would, she was perfectly aware, have the least effect upon the girl; but she did not wish to place herself in antagonism to her husband, and felt considerably perplexed as to what she had better do or say. It was clear Sir Armine had come down merely for the sake of seeing Yolande: how she wished he had stayed in London!

She wished so still more when towards the end of the evening her husband came up to her looking annoyed.

'Cannot you control Yolande, Constance? She is making herself conspicuous with that puppy Haverton, and absolutely snubbing Bracton. You should not allow it. Is there any nonsense between them, do you suppose?'

'He spoke to me to-night, and told me that he loved her.'

'Impudent puppy! He is a pauper. Do you understand me?—an absolute pauper! And yet you have let her go on dancing with him!

Really, if you do not care for your sister, you might have some respect for *my* wishes.'

'I have not encouraged Sir Armine,' said Constance, quietly: 'it would be impossible to forbid Yolande to dance with him, he has done nothing to justify such a step, but I will warn her not to do so too often. I am afraid you will be disappointed respecting Lord Bracton. I am sure she does not love him, and she will never marry a man she does not care for. I will not urge her to do so, and if I did it would be useless.'

'Did you tell her, as I desired you to do, that she was absolutely without fortune?'

'I did.'

'And she said?'

'Nothing, except that she was glad to know it.'

'Glad! that is a curious way to look at it.'

'I think—I don't know, but I fancy she meant that she liked to do anything that she might do with her eyes open.'

'I wish that might prove as wise as it sounds. It is absolute nonsense your refusing to speak to her about Bracton; try to make her hear reason: what could she expect better?'

'Not in a worldly point of view, of course, but that would not affect her if she does not love him.'

'You must reason her out of such absurdity.'

'I do not think it is absurdity,' said Constance, colouring; 'I feel she is right.'

'I am sorry you set yourself in deliberate opposition to my wishes,' he said, stiffly, and turned away to talk to Lady Bracton.

Constance felt that he was unjust, but that was nothing new: she had grown quite accustomed to being coldly blamed for anything that displeased her husband, whether it were really her fault or not, and took it as a simple matter

of course, always trying to moderate Yolande's transports of indignation at the injustice of the proceeding.

She had not consciously any creed on the subject, but the circumstances of her life had caused her, unknown to herself, to acquire a sort of belief that a woman's place was invariably that of a victim, and that the reason of her existence was to provide a sacrifice to the selfishness or the ill-temper of her masculine belongings.

Her feelings were very sensitive, and at first she had suffered bitterly from her husband's undeserved fault-finding, striving hard to believe that she must be to blame, and to discover how she had failed in her duty; but she was now placidly conscious that the fault lay in his temper and intolerance of anything that did not instantly yield to his will, and only strove not to irritate him by a semblance of opposition.

Still she would not promise to try to influence

Yolande: she knew it would be of no use, for the girl had strong views, and adhered to them firmly, and besides she considered it would be wrong. It was not for her, she thought, who had married without love, and found her life so joyless, even with the comforting reflection of having eased her father's anxieties, to urge a similar marriage, unjustified by such cogent reasons, upon her bright little sister. And she knew that a loveless marriage would be even more terrible to Yolande than to herself: the girl was impulsive, and had little of the patience and resignation which formed her own chief characteristics.

Constance pondered long that night as to how she could best avert the danger, which she foresaw was imminent, of an engagement between Yolande and Sir Armine. Yolande, being in love, would think all the warnings of ordinary prudence mercenary, and her wish not to encourage Lord Bracton was likely to make her all the warmer to her other lover.

She decided not to speak till the evening of the ball at the castle: perhaps then Yolande would be guided by her wishes, instead of thinking over them and considering where they might lead her. If she could leave Bracton unengaged to Sir Armine, in all probability they would not meet again before the next London season.

The day after the ball at Bracton, Mr. Verulam and one or two other gentlemen availed themselves of an invitation given the evening before by the Mayor to lunch with him and go over the docks and other objects of interest in the town.

After luncheon, the afternoon being beautiful after four and twenty hours of almost incessant heavy rain, Yolande reminded Lord Bracton of his promise of taking them to the cave. Several of the party were afraid to venture, the ladies being indifferent walkers, or alarmed at the idea of the precipices which Lord Bracton confessed existed. At length a party of six was arranged:

Constance and Yolande, a bright cheerful little Mrs. Derrington, her husband, Lord Bracton, and Colonel Latreille.

Ever since the first evening Colonel Latreille had avoided Constance quietly but entirely, and she had felt grateful to him for doing so. Ever since her husband's conversation after they retired that night, she had felt that he had a very strong suspicion as to what her feelings for Colonel Latreille had been, and as he wished her to avoid him, she was glad to find her task rendered easier than it would otherwise have been.

It was quite against the Colonel's own intentions that he was included in the cave party, but Lord Bracton was determined that there must be a gentleman to each lady, and everyone else had made other plans, so he felt obliged to go, comforting himself with the determination to devote himself exclusively to Mrs. Derrington.

The yacht's gig conveyed them across the

mouth of the bay, and deposited them at the landing-place on the inner side of the sandstone headland. The walk to the cave was not a very long one. It wound at first through the wood, and then curved round the point and followed a mere ledge on the seaward face of the cliff. Constance's head was fairly steady, but she could not repress a shudder at the thought that one false step must precipitate her into the sea below.

'You see,' said Lord Bracton, stopping when they came to a spot where, there being a tolerably large platform, it was possible to pause, 'I was right in saying we ought to take advantage of so perfectly still a day. Even in a slight breeze this path is far from pleasant.'

'I should think so, indeed,' said Mrs. Derrington, who was terribly frightened, and but for not liking to confess her nervousness, would have given all she possessed to

go back at once; 'have we much farther to go?'

'No, a very little way, and you have really seen the worst.'

'Does the cliff fall much?' asked Mr. Derrington, 'it seems curiously split in many places.'

'Yes, after frost or very heavy rain, pieces sometimes fall. Miss Woodroffe, are you rested? We had better go on.'

The path certainly improved, there was no longer the feeling of being a fly crawling along a perpendicular wall of rock.

'Here is our last difficulty,' said Lord Bracton, as they came to a deep cleft in the rock, almost to be called a ravine, and bridged by a single plank; 'let me go first, Miss Woodroffe, and take my hand—hold tight—there, that's right—after all it is nothing very dreadful.'

'One false step would be, though,' said Colonel Latreille.

'Don't talk of it!' cried Mrs. Derrington, with a shudder. 'I am quite nervous enough as it is.'

'Here is the cave,' said Lord Bracton, as they turned a sharp point of rock; 'Miss Woodroffe, I hope you will not be very much disappointed. You know I warned you there was not much to see.'

'Still it is my first cave, I am glad I came.'

'It is a beautiful sea view at any rate,' said Constance; 'how clearly we see the islands we went to see the other day.'

'I should think such excessive clearness foretold rain,' said Colonel Latreille.

'Yes, and I think we had better be making our way back, I fancy a little breeze is rising,' said Lord Bracton.

'George,' said Mrs. Derrington, clinging to her husband's arm, 'do take care of me yourself. I am so frightened at the thought of that dreadful path again!'

'Poor little woman!' he said, looking down at her, compassionately; 'I am sorry I let you come, but it can't be helped now, and it will soon be over.'

So, Lord Bracton and Yolande being in front, Constance and Colonel Latreille were of necessity left together. Neither spoke, and in silence they reached the bridge. The plank was not placed quite straight across the gully; it crossed it diagonally, and at the end nearest the cave was completely overhung by the rock, for half its length it was in fact roofed over, the rock only just allowing a tall man to stand upright.

The two first couples had crossed the plank, Mrs. Derrington, whose nerves had quite given way, shaking so with terror that she could hardly move. Constance had been slightly delayed by her dress catching upon a point of rock, and it was fortunate indeed that such was the case, for, without the slightest warning, the block of sandstone that formed

the roof of the bridge fell, carrying the plank away with it, and crashing down the gully on to the beach below.

Colonel Latreille, who was almost stepping on to the plank, started back hastily, so hastily indeed that he nearly lost his balance on the narrow path, and must have fallen had not Constance caught his arm. Her strength was not great, but it gave him the moment to recover himself. The group on the other side stood aghast; Mrs. Derrington subsided on the ground, and went into hysterics.

'Thank God, you are safe!' cried Lord Bracton, fervently. 'Good Heavens, what an escape! Mrs. Verulam, I am awfully sorry you should have been so terrified, and also that you are for the present a prisoner. I'll send up some of the men from the yacht with a plank as soon as ever I can. Latreille, you'd better take Mrs. Verulam back to the cave; it will be more sheltered for her there than in this exposed place, and the men will

come and tell you when they are ready. Mrs. Derrington, do you think you could move? The wind is really rising, and we had better get on as soon as possible.'

Mrs. Derrington rose, and the party was soon out of sight. Colonel Latreille turned to Constance.

'Bracton is right,' he said, 'the cave is the best place of shelter. I am afraid you are not well,' he added, hastily; for she was growing momentarily whiter.

'It was a terribly narrow escape,' she murmured, and fainted.

He caught her in his arms, and carried her to the cave, where, laying her on the ground, he chafed her hands, and did everything in his power to restore animation, but for a long time without result. He grew terribly alarmed. Seeing her lie there so white and silent, it almost seemed as if she would never revive.

'Oh, my darling, my darling,' he murmured,

almost inaudibly, as he bent over her, terrified at the long insensibility, 'what can I do for you? Wake, wake, my darling!'

The words, and perhaps still more the fact that he was fervently kissing her hands, seemed to revive Constance. She came back slowly to life, and sat up, looking considerably embarrassed. For the moment Colonel Latreille had utterly lost his presence of mind, and instead of ignoring his own loss of self-command, and thus enabling her to appear unconscious of it, began confusedly to make excuses.

'I don't know, Mrs. Verulam, what you must think of me; whether you ever can forgive me—but—my alarm—your long insensibility, terror for one I had loved so fondly—I forgot myself.'

Constance was terribly embarrassed, but she could not suppress a start as he spoke of having loved her. He observed it, and continued:

'You look surprised, but surely, Constance—I mean Mrs. Verulam—you must have guessed my secret, must have known that I loved you? I loved you from that first night at Woodroffe Manor; it was to see you I manœuvred for an invitation to Caenthorpe, that I threw up other engagements to come to Ashford. Surely you must have known this.'

Her answer, after a pause, was very low.

'I had no right to think so—you never told me.'

'No, and for that I shall suffer and be remorseful to the end of my life. I had a foolish whim to speak to you on the Sunday, knowing how at Ashford the party always dispersed on that day, and that it would be easy to get you to myself. Then all was upset by my mother telegraphing to me for a foolish whim, and within a week I heard of your engagement from your brother. It made me very bitter.'

'It was for Basil and my father,' said Constance, hastily, forgetting that it was an admission it was scarcely loyal to her husband to make.

'I know that now, and it makes my remorse for my own folly all the more poignant. Tell me—we shall never speak on this subject again—am I right? would you have made me happy?'

'Yes,' said Constance, in a whisper.

'And would have kept to me even when urged to help your brother?'

'Yes.'

'Then more than ever I have reason to curse my own folly and procrastination. Oh, Constance, if you only knew how I loved you—nay, God knows how I love you still, you would feel for me.'

'I do,' said Constance, turning very pale and her voice shaking, 'but we must say no more of this. Remember I am Mr. Verulam's wife,

and do not force me to hear what is treason to him.'

'I promise never to open my lips on the subject again—but this once—Constance, tell me: are you happy?'

She coloured hotly.

'It is a question which you should not ask, and which I cannot answer,' she said.

'You are right,—forgive me—it was a foolish question, and one of which I fear I know the answer only too well. But there is another I may and must ask you—is my presence a trouble to you? Would you rather see me or not?'

The remembrance of her husband's command that she was to keep Colonel Latreille at a distance made Constance colour.

'I think,' she stammered, 'that is I—Mr. Verulam——'

He held up his hand.

'Do not distress yourself by saying any more,' he said: 'I perfectly understand, and you may rely upon it that I will never in any way prove a source of annoyance to you. I cannot say I am sorry we have had this explanation, painful as it has been to me. I hope you do not regret it either.'

'No,' said Constance, raising her head and looking him for one instant straight in the eyes, then averting her face again, 'I—I am glad, in spite of all, to know that I was not deceived.'

He gave her hand one long lingering pressure, and then left the cave to enable her to recover her composure.

A great change had come over the aspect of affairs while this heart-stirring scene had been taking place. The wind had risen considerably and was driving the rain in blinding sheets before it, while the sea, so short a time before so blue and calm, was covered with foam and the waves were breaking heavily at the foot

of the cliffs. Colonel Latreille shuddered as he thought of the unprotected path and of the difficulty of conveying Constance along it in such a storm. It was surely time that some one should be arriving to compass their release, and he walked on towards the gully, finding some difficulty in the worst gusts in retaining his footing. He came in sight of the spot just as Lord Bracton and a party of sailors reached it from the other side.

'I am afraid you must have thought us a long time,' cried Lord Bracton, 'but we had to go back for ropes when we found how stormy it was; the path wasn't safe without them. I hope Mrs. Verulam isn't frightened? She will need all her nerve.'

'She had a long fainting-fit with the shock, but is quite recovered now. I don't think she knows anything of the storm; it is not perceptible in the cave. Would it not be possible to carry her?'

'We must try; but it is a ticklish business

on that narrow ledge; however, if it can be done, a sailor can do it. There,'—as the men, who were headed by the mate, had been quickly getting two stout planks into position, and securing them with stones—'there is your means of escape. Stephen,'—turning to the mate—'what do you say? Can one of the men carry Mrs. Verulam, or is it safer to trust to the ropes?'

'I think the ropes, my lord; you see, the path's that narrow, I'm afraid the lady's weight might just overbalance him.'

'You hear,' said Lord Bracton to Colonel Latreille; 'we are roped just like Alpine climbers. We must make as light of it to her as possible, and the sooner we start the better; it is getting worse every moment.'

Constance felt her heart sink as the rope was fastened round her, and she realised how perilous their progress must necessarily be; but she resolutely determined to give no expression to her terror, and listened attentively

to the instructions given her. She was placed in the centre between the two strongest men, and the procession started.

Every moment the storm increased in fury, rain and hail were driven by the wind with such violence as to cut the skin like a knife, and the gusts were so strong that it seemed as if the whole line clinging to the rope must be swept off the cliff. For one thing Constance was thankful: the sheets of rain and the darkness caused by the storm somewhat obscured the depths below, and relieved her from the sickening giddiness she had felt on her way to the cave. But it was with unspeakable thankfulness that she at length found herself, wet through and shivering, standing among the trees on the inner side of the point while the ropes were unloosed, with that terrible cliff-walk a hideous nightmare of the past.

'I am afraid our troubles are not quite over yet,' said Lord Bracton, after a brief confer-

ence with the mate; 'Stephen says there is such a sea setting in through the mouth of the bay that we cannot go straight across—no boat could live. We shall have to go some way up the bay and sweep round. It would not matter, if Mrs. Verulam were not so wet. However, there is no help for it.'

Nearly two hours of very rough rowing had to be endured before Constance was lifted out of the boat and carried up to the castle by two of the sailors. Mr. Verulam, looking very pompous and displeased, met her at the door, but found himself at once put on one side and ignored by Lady Bracton, who, with Yolande, attended her to her room, and insisted on her having a hot bath, drinking hot brandy and water, and going to bed immediately.

CHAPTER X.

Why should I blush to own I love?
'Tis love that rules the realms above;
Why should I blush to say to all
That virtue holds my heart in thrall?

HENRY KIRK WHITE.

On you, most lov'd, with anxious fear I wait,
And from your judgment must expect my fate.

ADDISON.

IT was very late the following morning before Constance woke; for her night's rest had been very feverish and disturbed. Over and over again she had, between waking and sleeping, passed along that terrible ledge of rock, and started up with a shriek of terror as she fancied herself falling on to the beach

below. It was not till the early morning that she fell into a refreshing sleep.

When she awoke, the first thing she saw was Yolande, who was perched on the foot of her bed, watching her attentively.

'What a nice sleep you have had, Conny dear!' she exclaimed, kissing her. 'How do you feel?'

Constance half raised herself, and fell back on her pillow.

'Very weak and tired and good for nothing.'

'They all said you would, and Lady Bracton begs you will keep quite quiet, and not think of getting up. She says your nerves will want a complete rest. Oh! Conny darling, what an awfully narrow escape it was! I thought I should have died of fright when that stone fell.'

'I suppose it was,' said Constance, dreamily.

The agitating conversation with Colonel Latreille, and the subsequent terror of the cliff-

walk, had almost obliterated the original peril from her mind.

'Perhaps you hardly realised it. Colonel Latreille said you fainted,' said Yolande. 'Oh, he is going away this afternoon. I heard him tell Lady Bracton at breakfast that he had a letter which called him away; he couldn't even manage to stay for the ball to-night.'

Constance felt that she was the cause of this. He had understood that his presence made a difficulty for her, and at once hastened to relieve her of it. She was duly grateful, though she was conscious of a pang of regret at not seeing him again. Still she knew that his absence was for the best; while he was present, it was more than ever difficult not to contrast the 'might have been' with reality.

'I suppose I must go now, and tell Mr. Verulam you are awake,' said Yolande, after her sister had had some breakfast: 'I promised I would let him know, so as to prevent his coming in and disturbing you. I'm sure I

hope he won't talk to you much; you look very white, as if you ought to go to sleep again.'

'Was he much put out, Yolande?' asked Constance, anxiously.

'Yes,' replied Yolande, candidly; 'he seemed quite unable to accept it as an accident, though I'm sure I don't know who he suspected of getting that rock to fall and frighten us out of our seven senses. Lord Bracton got quite vexed at last, and said, of course, he was awfully sorry, he'd have given worlds it hadn't happened, but he really couldn't see how anyone was to blame.'

Constance sighed.

'I don't suppose he'll worry you,' said Yolande, pausing at the door; 'if I thought he would, I'd vow you were asleep all day long.'

Mr. Verulam speedily made his appearance in his wife's room.

'I hope you are not seriously indisposed,'

he said, coldly; 'though, indeed, if you were, it is hardly wonderful after your escapade of yesterday.'

'It was a very narrow escape of a terrible accident.'

'So I am given to understand, but if you had been in your proper place, you would not have been in danger. You know that you take precedence of Mrs. Derrington: why did you allow her and your sister to precede you?'

At any other time the idea of following the correct rules of precedence on a cliff-path would have made Constance smile, but at present she felt little inclined for mirth; it was evident that her husband was very angry.

'It is clear to me,' continued Mr. Verulam, 'that your reason for lingering behind was that you might enjoy a *tête-a-tête* with that very forward Colonel Latreille, with whom I had already desired you to hold no more communication than was necessitated by the courtesy due to a fellow-guest. But you set my wishes

at defiance, and not only contrived to abandon your proper place, but to choose as your escort Colonel Latreille instead of Mr. Derrington, to whom I should not have objected.'

'There I had no choice: Mrs. Derrington claimed her husband's escort.'

'Then you should have taken Lord Bracton.'

'He was already some yards in front with Yolande.'

Mr. Verulam looked considerably annoyed.

'I regret to perceive,' he said, very stiffly, 'that you decline to acknowledge yourself to be in the wrong, as is most undoubtedly the case. I go to Bracton for a few hours, and in my absence you set off on a wild expedition, escorted by the very man I have requested you to avoid. And what is the consequence? Not content with disregarding my expressed wishes, you loiter behind with him and, by a remarkable, I may say a *most* remarkable, accident, find yourself separated from your

party and left alone with him for hours. I do not wish to speak harshly when your nerves are, as I am informed, upset, but it is very painful to me that my wife should voluntarily have placed herself in so compromising a position.'

'You must hear the right story once for all,' said Constance firmly, though her cheeks flamed at the word 'compromising.' 'Yolande was anxious to visit this cave, and, of course, I went with her; if I had had the slightest idea of the sort of path it was, we should never have attempted it. Mr. Derrington was my escort to the cave, as we returned his wife claimed him, and they started before I could have asserted my "precedence," if indeed I had ever thought of such a thing. I was close to them, so close to them that I must have been on the bridge when the rock fell, had not my dress caught in the rock, and I had to wait a moment while Colonel Latreille released me. I do not see what I have done worthy of blame, unless in-

deed you fancy that I loosened the rock so as to secure imprisonment in an extremely uncomfortable cave.'

'Flippancy will not mend the matter,' said Mr. Verulam, pompously, 'and nothing will alter the fact that Colonel Latreille has it in his power to boast that he passed some hours alone with my wife under very peculiar circumstances.'

'Colonel Latreille is a gentleman,' said Constance, quietly; 'if ever he refers to the matter he will tell the story truly, and the most jaundiced mind could hardly see any harm in it.'

'I am flattered by your inference,' said her husband, bitterly; 'however, as my wishes have evidently no influence with you, I now give you my commands that you do not speak to Colonel Latreille again.'

'Very well,' said Constance, calmly.

She knew very well he would not again approach her.

'Pray, do you intend to play the invalid all day?'

'I shall remain in my room, I do not feel strong enough to come down.'

'I particularly wish you to appear at the ball in your *parure* of rubies.'

'If I feel well enough towards evening I will try; but I do not feel as if it were likely.'

'Which means, I suppose, that you intend to disregard my wishes,' and Mr. Verulam left the room.

'Conny, have you discovered who he thinks upset the rock?' asked Yolande, when she returned; then, catching a glimpse of her sister's white, pained face, she exclaimed:

'Conny, surely he has not been worrying you?'

'It is nothing, dear, only his way of showing he was annoyed at what had happened,' answered Constance, feebly.

She felt at that moment as if her lot was

heavier than she could bear. A loveless marriage was bad enough, but cold injustice seemed unbearable. She felt too weak and ill to comfort herself with her usual reflection that tyranny and oppression were woman's legitimate burden.

'Annoyed! I have no patience with him! When he ought to thank Providence on his knees for having saved you from such awful danger.'

'He is very anxious I should appear to-night. I am afraid though I shall hardly be able.'

'Don't upset yourself, dear—do just what you feel best for you.'

'I want to say something to you about to-night,' said Constance, drawing her sister's face down to her pillow and kissing her fondly; 'I think, dear, it would be better if you did not dance *quite* so often with Sir Armine. It was a little conspicuous the other night.'

Yolande coloured deeply.

'Was it? I am sorry. I did not mean it. I hardly know how often—it—it was so pleasant!'

'May it not be too pleasant, dear?'

'Conny, what do you mean? You don't think that—that he means nothing?'

The last words were almost inaudible.

'No, darling, I do not. But, Yolande, I am afraid it would not be possible.'

'You mean, because he is poor? Conny, you have often said money doesn't bring happiness.'

'That is true, dear, but it is equally true that poverty brings care. And you are too young to be allowed to choose poverty as yet.'

'I am old enough to know my own mind, Conny.'

'So you think now, but as years—nay, even as months pass on, you will be astonished to find how your views of things change. You know I am not speaking

coldly, Yolande, that my only wish is your happiness.'

'I know, I know.'

'Like you, Sir Armine is very young. Men change far more quickly than we do, Yolande, although they love to call us fickle. He is very poor, you have nothing. What hope is there that it would be allowed?'

'We could wait.'

'But for what? It isn't as if he had any expectations. He will be no better off ten years hence than he is now, and you will have lost all your youth.'

'That wouldn't matter,' said Yolande, with a ghastly smile. 'I shall never care for anyone else.'

'You are not seventeen yet, dear; and, Yolande, remember how you used to hate poverty at home, and this would be much worse.'

'I don't think it was the poverty I minded so much; it was the injustice, the feeling

that, while we were being made uncomfortable, Basil was wasting the money, and never even thinking of us. But don't let us talk any more about it now, Conny dear. You ought to rest. I'll promise you to be careful to-night, so that not even Mr. Verulam can say I am conspicuous.'

'He would be greatly pleased, if you would think of Lord Bracton.'

'Yes, I know; but I can't do that, Conny. Please don't ask me. I could never love him, even if I cared for no one else. It's of no use your asking me. Why, I don't know myself, but I know that it is so. And, if I married a man I didn't love, I should hate him, and most likely do something dreadful.'

'I will never press you to marry anyone, dear. I would not lay such a weight on my conscience. I only ask you to pause before you fetter your bright youth with what must at the best be a long, and, I fear, a hopeless, engagement.'

'You may trust me, Conny. I'll be prudence itself. Now I shall go away, that you may go to sleep.'

Lady Bracton and all her guests were astonished when, just before the ball-guests began to arrive, Constance made her appearance. She looked very pale, and little fitted for exertion, but she said she felt tolerably well, though she feared she should not be able to sit up very long.

Everyone crowded round her, and Mr. Verulam was divided between satisfaction that *his* wife was made a person of so much importance, and annoyance that the whole party should give such unequivocal evidence that they regarded as pure accident what he had chosen to stigmatise as a crime. It would, he feared, impair the effect of his strictures on his wife's conduct.

Constance wore the splendid rubies set in diamonds, of which he was so proud, and which he so dearly loved to exhibit, that he

preferred that his wife should come down when manifestly unfit to do so, rather than forego the pleasure of the display. She looked lovely, but very fragile, in her clouds of Brussels lace, looped up with dark-red carnations. Yolande wore the same flowers on a yellow crape dress, and both sisters carried large bouquets of carnations and ferns, triumphs of the Bracton gardener.

The first dance on the programme was a valse, for which Yolande had engaged herself at the Bracton ball to Sir Armine; but, to her surprise, Lord Bracton ordered a quadrille first, and asked her to dance it. It was very marked, and she was greatly annoyed; for, as such a dance had not been contemplated, it was naturally impossible to plead a previous engagement. Her flash of indignant vexation at finding herself in the conspicuous position of opening the ball was of course interpreted as showing her extreme elation, and various ill-natured speeches as to her and her sister's

'skilful manœuvres' were made by those who were disappointed at her being preferred before them.

Lord Bracton found her excessively cold and stiff, but he could not believe that when he actually put the question, as he was fully determined to do that night, she would refuse him. She had been undoubtedly difficult to win, had shown none of the eager appreciation of his attentions to which he was so well accustomed from other damsels; still the idea that he, the nineteenth Earl of Bracton, with a rent-roll of £160,000 a year and some of the finest diamonds in England, could possibly be refused, seemed to him too wild to be possible.

It was with some difficulty that he extracted the promise of a valse from Yolande; she seemed to have engaged herself indefinitely, and he was obliged to be satisfied with one late in the evening, and left her with Constance, while he went to perform what he told her would all be 'duty' dances.

The sight of Yolande opening the ball, and evidently regarded by everyone as the bride-elect of the host, had proved too much for the prudence with which Sir Armine had hitherto fortified himself. After a few turns almost in silence, he drew her into a boudoir opening off the ball-room, a curious little octagon room built on a projecting point of rock and hanging over the sea. It was very dimly lit,—indeed the moonlight pouring in at the window formed its chief illumination. But both the young people were too agitated to observe their surroundings; Yolande's heart throbbed till she felt as if it must suffocate her.

Since Constance had spoken to her that morning she had spent the greater part of the day in her own room, deciding on what her course should be. She loved Sir Armine very dearly, she felt that for herself she would have no fear of the poverty of which her sister spoke, but she thought, what Constance had not said, that she would be injuring her

lover by allowing him to choose a penniless wife.

Her mother had always insisted strongly upon how much more necessary money was to men than women, as an excuse for Basil's absorption of all the family resources; and, although Yolande had always vehemently protested against this as gross injustice when applied to her brother, it gave a strong bias to her reflections respecting Sir Armine.

Sir Armine was very agitated; he placed Yolande on the window-seat and stood before her, his hands working together nervously.

'I—I wanted to speak to you,' he said. 'I think, Miss Woodroffe—Yolande—you must guess what it is I wish to say. I—I love you with all my heart.'

Yolande was silent, for she really could not speak. It was rapture to hear him, and yet—torture to feel that she must refuse.

'I know I oughtn't to speak to you,' the

young man went on, growing momentarily more agitated; 'I know I've no right to ask a bright, beautiful young thing like you to share my poverty; for I am poor, Yolande, hideously poor. I meant to have been silent and waited, but somehow to-night, when I saw you opening the ball and heard them say you were to be Lady Bracton——'

'That at any rate I shall never be,' said Yolande.

He seized both her hands.

'You mean that? You will give me hope?' he exclaimed, eagerly.

'I did not say that. Sir Armine, do you know that I am penniless?'

'Do you think that would weigh with me for a moment?'

'Not now perhaps, but it would—it must. And what can you think of me to imagine that I would do you the injury of weighing you down for life with a wife who would be merely a burden and no help?'

'Yolande, do not speak so coldly. If only you love me——'

'I do,' she said, very gravely: 'I love you too well to blight your whole life. Men cannot be happy on very narrow means as women can, and hereafter you might——'

'I could never do anything but bless you for making me the happiest of men,' cried Sir Armine, excitedly. 'Yolande dearest, you have owned that you love me, what else is there to care for?'

'A great deal,' said Yolande, controlling her agitation with infinite difficulty, and keeping her eyes fixed on the ground. She knew if she once met his eyes her self-possession would desert her. 'Love is not everything. You called yourself "hideously poor." If you feel so now—alone, how much more would you do so with a wife?'

'Don't talk like that!' said Sir Armine, in a pained voice: 'you would be the light of my eyes! Don't you know that a

wife halves one's griefs and doubles one's joys?'

'She halves your bread and butter too,' said Yolande, sadly.

'What matter for that? Yolande, if you love me—and, dear, you say you do,—let us go away to some place where money is not everything. I believe in quiet places in France one can live on next to nothing, and we might be as happy as the day is long.'

For a moment an irresistible temptation almost overcame Yolande: for one instant she saw a vision of a blissful existence—they two alone in some quiet sequestered spot. But her experience of the world, though short, had been sufficient to teach her that men hardly saw things in the same light as women, and to make her understand that, though at first Sir Armine might find her all-sufficient to reconcile him to expatriation, he would soon begin to hate a life so unnatural to him. So with a stifled sigh she shook her head.

'You think so now, but you do not know—it would never do. You would pine for your old associates and occupations, and we should both be miserable.'

'You cannot love me as I love you, or you would feel that we could never be miserable together. But I see you are determined. I ought to have known I had no chance. You will marry a rich man and be happy, and I——'

'I shall never marry,' said Yolande, in a very low voice.

'You think so now, but—the time will come, and I—I can only pray it may be for your happiness.'

'The time will never come,' she said, rising, for she felt that she could not bear much more: 'but indeed—indeed it must be as I say, though I can't tell you how it hurts me to grieve you. Now will you take me back to Conny? She will wonder what has become of me.'

'Wait one moment,' he said, laying his hand

on her arm: 'you say you love me—you say you will never marry. I will not ask you to engage yourself to me, I will leave you free as air, but I swear to you that, while you remain unmarried, I shall never think of any other woman.'

He offered her his arm, and led her in silence back to Constance.

Their absence had not been very long, but quite sufficiently so to render Constance uneasy, and she glanced anxiously at their countenances as they approached her. But there was certainly nothing of the air of a successful lover about Sir Armine, and as soon as he had relinquished Yolande to another partner he turned away and disappeared.

Yolande too looked very grave, and quite destitute of her usual brightness, and Constance's heart ached as she watched her. Oh! if she had but the command of wealth! Why even the rubies flashing on her head, neck, and arms, which gave her not the smallest pleasure,

represented a sum that might make her little sister happy. She gradually felt herself becoming faint with fatigue, and stole upstairs unperceived.

Lord Bracton's valse came very late in the evening, but, as he came to claim her for it, Yolande perceived that Sir Armine had suddenly re-appeared and was watching her with an air of profound melancholy. This embarrassed her, and she hardly paid any attention to what her partner said, till she was suddenly aroused by finding that he was leading her into the very room where her interview with Sir Armine had taken place.

She stopped short.

'I am not tired, Lord Bracton,' she said, coldly: 'I assure you I do not want to rest.'

'It is not that,' he said, speaking rapidly, and in what, for him, was a very excited manner, 'but I want to speak to you.'

'It can be nothing you cannot say as well here,' said Yolande, still resisting.

'Yes it is, here we should be interrupted, please come in here,' and she acceded, unwillingly indeed, but feeling that it was useless to attempt longer to escape the proposal which seemed imminent.

He placed her in the very seat she had before occupied, but, unlike Sir Armine, he seated himself by her side. Indeed Lord Bracton was disturbed by no fears as to the reception to be granted to his suit. It had never occurred to him as possible that any young lady honoured by his preference would even dream of refusing him, and he certainly had tolerable warrant for his presumption in the warm encouragement which had always been accorded to him.

It is true that Yolande had never distinguished him in any way, but he had never realised that she carefully avoided doing so: he thought it only the difference of her manner,

and never doubted what her answer would be. There was none of the trembling nervousness of Sir Armine's voice in his first observation.

'I think you must know what it is I want to say.'

Yolande was silent; in truth she was greatly annoyed. She had striven hard, as hard indeed as it was possible to do without actual discourtesy to her host, to show Lord Bracton that she did not care for him, and she felt it very hard that he should not have understood her, and that she should therefore have the very disagreeable task of refusing him. There was no sorrow in it like what she had felt in refusing Sir Armine, the man to whom her whole heart was given, the only person she firmly believed whom she could ever love. Still it was extremely vexatious, and her chief feeling was one of anger.

Lord Bracton was evidently surprised at her silence, but very soon he continued:

'I think, Miss Woodroffe—may I not say Yolande?' and he took her hand.

'No, you may not,' said Yolande, coldly, withdrawing it quietly but decidedly.

'But why? Surely you know what I want to ask you? Yolande, dear Yolande, I have loved you ever since I first saw you, say you care for me, that you will be my wife.'

'I told you, Lord Bracton,' said Yolande, coldly, 'that I objected to your calling me by my Christian name, and yet you immediately repeated it. I beg you will not do so again. I am of course honoured by the proposal you have made me, but I cannot accept it, for I do not feel that I could ever care for you.'

'Do you mean to say you refuse me?' said Lord Bracton, with a perfect gasp of amazement.

'Yes,' said Yolande. quietly.

But why? Surely you must have under-

stood all along? Why refuse me now?'

'I do not pretend to have been blind to your feelings,' said Yolande, very calmly, it was comparatively so much easier to speak now that her heart was in no way interested in the matter, than it had been in the case of Sir Armine: 'I have steadily endeavoured to show you that I did not share them; I feel sure you will do me the justice to acknowledge that.'

'I never even guessed such a thing! I thought——'

'That I was quite certain to accept the position of Countess of Bracton, whether I cared for you or not? I am greatly flattered by your opinion of me.'

'But—I do not understand. Why do you not care for me?'

'I do not. Surely that is answer sufficient.'

'Then you care for some one else? Who is it?'

'You have no right either to ask such a ques-

tion or to infer that there *is* anyone. Surely it may be possible not to care for you without such a contingency.'

'But—but,' said Lord Bracton, whose self-complacency, and indeed all whose ideas, were completely upset by so utterly unexpected an event as Yolande's rejection, 'do you really mean it? I'm so awfully fond of you—and surely you can't mean to make me so wretched.'

He was no longer seated in complacent security by her side. He was standing before her, nearly as agitated as Sir Armine had been, though perhaps his sensations were rather those of an astonished and mortified vanity than of wounded affection, although he really believed himself to be genuinely in love.

'I am really very sorry,' said Yolande: 'I have tried my best not to give you anything that you could think was encouragement: indeed, I have done everything short of being absolutely rude to you. I wish you had under-

stood, but it is not my fault that you did not. You ask me why I do not care for you—I don't suppose that is a question anyone could answer—all I can say is—I do not.'

'But—if you care for no one else I am sure you very soon would—you could not help it—I would love you, so I must win your love in time.'

Was there ever a man yet who did not believe implicitly in his power to make a woman love him, in face of the many sad experiments of loveless marriages where 'love is sure to come,' but where in so piteously frequent instances, hatred comes instead?

'I do not believe in love "coming,"' said Yolande. 'You know the poet says—

> "Oh! tell me how love cometh?
> 'Tis here, unsought, unsent,"

and that is true. I do not love you, Lord Bracton, and I am very, very sorry that you love me as you say you do. But there is nothing more

to be said. Will you please take me back to the ball-room.'

'I cannot believe you really mean it,' he persisted: 'I have spoken too soon—I have startled you. Let me come to you again in six months, in a year—when you like. Give me, at any rate, some hope.'

'I cannot,' said Yolande: 'it would be only deceiving you if I did. You did not take me by surprise. As I told you, I have guessed your wishes, and have done my very best to show you that it was not in my power to gratify them. Six months, or a year, or ten years hence, my answer would be just the same.'

'You fancy so now, but——'

'Oh! Lord Bracton, pray believe me that it is no use. I know my own mind, and nothing that you can say will change it.'

She rose, and moved towards the door.

'I must believe you,' he said: 'but it is a bitter blow.'

'I am sorry, she said, gently: 'but indeed I did my best to avoid inflicting it.'

As soon as he had left her near his mother and turned to some one else, Yolande quietly disappeared to her own room.

CHAPTER XI.

There are smiles and tears in the mother's eyes,
For her new-born babe beside her lies;
Oh, heaven of bliss! when the heart o'erflows
With the rapture a mother only knows!

HENRY WARE, JUNIOR.

IT was almost a relief to Yolande, when she went into her sister's room the next morning, to find that Constance was not well enough to rise. She was of course sorry that she was ill, but it afforded her a welcome excuse for remaining upstairs, and avoiding Lord Bracton. She told Constance what she had done.

'I never could have cared for him, Conny, I am glad it is over, but it was very disagreeable.

I am sure he was very stupid not to understand, I did my best to make it plain.'

'Well, dear, of course if you could not care for him you were quite right. I am afraid Mr. Verulam will be vexed.'

'I can't help that. I can't marry to please him.'

'Yolande, did—did Sir Armine speak to you last night.'

'Yes,' said Yolande, turning away and colouring hotly.

'And you said —?'

'I—told him I—loved him too well to bind him down to poverty with a penniless wife.'

'How did he take it?'

'Oh, he tried to make me believe we could go off to Brittany, or somewhere of that sort, and be as happy as the day is long. It did sound very tempting, Conny, but that, of course, I knew it would not do—it would not last—for him.'

'Dear, I am sure you have decided right.'

'Yes, I know I have. I am glad, Conny, you talked to me about it and made me think. I should have known that I should not mind poverty for myself, but I am afraid I should not have thought of him.'

'Dear child, I am sorry for you.'

'Yes,' and Yolande's eyes filled with tears; 'I am sorry for myself too, Conny; what a great thing money is!'

'How did Sir Armine take his disappointment?'

'At first he thought, I believe, that it was Lord Bracton; but when he found it was not, when I told him that though I could not marry him I would never marry anyone else, he swore that while I remained single he would do so too.'

'Very romantic, dear, but I am sorry you said anything of the kind. I like you to be quite free.'

'I am—we both are; but, Conny, when one loves anyone what does it matter what one says? I couldn't marry anyone else.'

'You think so now.'

'And always shall. Now, Conny dear, if you had cared for anyone as I do for *him* you could never have married Mr. Verulam, not if it was to have done even greater things for Basil than it did, you know you couldn't.'

Constance did not answer. Ah! if Yolande only knew the pain she had endured, the anguish it was to her even now to think of what might have been, more especially since that interview in the cave had told her that her heart had not deceived her, that Bernard Latreille had really loved her! She knew only too well that she loved him still, and was almost terrified to realize how well she knew that his love for her was as deep as ever, and how infinite was the satisfaction she derived from the knowledge.

Mr. Verulam was greatly annoyed at his wife's indisposition, more especially as it prevented her attending the second ball at Bracton, and exhibiting a splendid set of diamonds and cat's-eyes which he had just given her. He regarded her as a means of displaying his wealth and taste, and was far from pleased when anything occurred to disappoint his wishes. On this occasion he was doubly annoyed because Yolande insisted on remaining at home with her sister.

'It is simply ridiculous,' he said, 'it is not as if Constance were really ill.'

'She is not well, and it would be dull for her to be left alone.'

'There is no necessity for your remaining at home. And it will not look well. I am sure it will annoy Bracton to have his party spoilt.'

'I can't help that, Conny's pleasure is a great deal more to me than what Lord Bracton likes.'

'Indeed you had better go, Yolande,' said Constance, earnestly.

But Yolande was determined. She felt a strong suspicion that Lord Bracton had not really believed her rejection to be absolutely final, and was extremely anxious to avoid any chance of private conversation with him—at any rate, for the present. If she went to the ball, she could hardly refuse to dance with her host, and he would have an opportunity, if he chose, of saying what she would prefer not to hear. So she held steadfastly to her determination, thereby making her brother-in-law extremely angry.

Two days after, they left Bracton; Yolande having contrived to avoid any *tête-a-tête* with her host.

'Good-bye, Miss Woodroffe,' he said at parting—'or, rather, I should say *au revoir:* Mr. Verulam has asked me to stay at Caenthorpe next month.'

Yolande's first determination was that, if he

were to be at Caenthorpe, she would not stay there; she would remain at home, and avoid seeing him. But she found that this would be impossible. Constance's health was far from strong, and there was so much that her sister could do for her, so much trouble that she could take off her hands, that Yolande soon reconciled herself to living almost entirely at Caenthorpe. When Conny was strong again, it would be different, she told herself; then she could stay at home or not, as she pleased, but now she was really of use.

Mr. Verulam's idea of the advantage of a place like Caenthorpe was to have it constantly full of the smartest people of his acquaintance. He did not like the idea of small parties of real friends; he preferred the house being quite full, and having as much display as possible.

Unfortunately, he would not leave the management of things to his wife. Constance had genuinely social instincts, and, left to herself, she would have made her house thoroughly

pleasant, following in many ways Lady Louisa de Vere's system at Ashford, and not insisting on people being amused in her way, but allowing them to please themselves.

But this did not at all suit Mr. Verulam's views; he thought that a hostess should never for a moment be absent from her guests, and ought to arrange in the morning every minutest detail for their amusement throughout the day; and when Constance ventured to urge her very different views, he assured her that he knew best, and desired her to write and invite Lady Selina Longden. 'She knew exactly how a houseful of guests should be managed, and would put her in the right way,'

Constance did not like Lady Selina at all. Though she was very sweet-tempered and difficult to rouse, she had several times in London felt that that lady took considerably too much upon herself; and, under colour of giving her advice, treated her with a want of proper deference.

It was, she felt, useless to represent this to her husband; he would not understand her, and would think she was complaining about nothing. It was easier to comply and say nothing; after all, she reflected sadly, she owed his wishes all the more deference as she had done him the wrong of marrying him without having a heart to give him, especially as it appeared he had never been told the truth, as she had begged he might be. So, without a word of remonstrance, she sat down and wrote, as he desired, to Lady Selina.

The result of Lady Selina's arrival was that the party she superintended at Caenthorpe was as stiff and dull as it was possible to conceive. Constance found that all her alterations in the arrangement of the drawing-room furniture were quietly reversed. Lady Selina disapproved of anything that afforded opportunities for *tête-à-têtes*, and arranged all the seats in a formal circle, from which there was no means of escape. It was ordained at breakfast what

everyone should do during the entire day, and, if any member contrived to shirk her appointed entertainment, she was made to feel that she had done something extremely reprehensible.

Constance bore it all in silence, and restrained Yolande from open complaint, hoping that when Lady Selina took her departure she might be permitted to model her next party more to her own taste. But the hope proved delusive. Mr. Verulam quickly detected the least deviation from Lady Selina's rules, and insisted on recurrence to them, so that the country house parties, which Constance had thought would be pleasanter than her London entertainments, became an inexpressible weariness to her.

There was another disappointment too in her country life. At the Manor she had always been accustomed to know intimately all the people in the village; and, though she had been unable, especially of late, to do much for them in the way of charity, her sympathy and inter-

est in their welfare had made her welcome in every cottage.

But Mr. Verulam would not permit her to visit the cottages, and make acquaintance with the people at Caenthorpe. He did not, he said, believe in the advisability of the intermingling of classes. Constant looking to the house for assistance demoralised and pauperised the people, who should instead be taught and encouraged to help themselves. And acting on this principle he would allow nothing to be given away; he permitted clothing, blanket, and coal clubs to be established, because these 'supplemented the economies of the people themselves,' and he sold milk in any quantity at an extremely low rate, but he would not permit a drop of it to be given away.

In all this he was conscientiously doing what he believed to be right and best for the people; he had naturally none of the old traditional feeling, which had been handed down among the lords of the soil from feudal times, that the

great house of the village stood in the position of a parent to its poorer neighbours, and was bound to give them judicious but generous help. He would not permit his wife to teach in the school as she had been accustomed to do.

'The master and mistress are paid to teach the children,' he said: 'if they cannot do so efficiently, by all means let them be dismissed and others appointed, but do not encourage them to shirk their work by doing for them what they receive payment for. They would despise you for such weakness. Go to the schools for the quarterly examination if you choose, but not oftener.'

Constance knew it was useless to remonstrate, and to explain that she would like to learn to know the children and their individual characters. Mr. Verulam was always so perfectly satisfied with his own opinions and arguments that he seldom troubled himself even to listen to those of others, more especially of women, for whose views he had the profound contempt

common among the class from which he sprung. So she merely obeyed his wishes, and compensated herself by giving Yolande money to bestow on her old pensioners at Woodroffe.

The one satisfaction in Constance's life was the sight of her father, relieved from care, and able once more to enjoy himself among his friends. Whenever she drove over to the Manor and marked the difference in the comforts of the whole establishment, or whenever he came to Caenthorpe, talking more cheerfully than she had known him do for years, her heart was lightened, for she felt that her sacrifice, bitter as it was, had not been in vain. Mrs. Woodroffe was ill pleased at many things, and more especially at Constance's refusal to help Basil, of which he had duly informed her.

'I never could have believed you would have been so selfish, Constance! Of what use is all your wealth except to help others,

and yet you heartlessly refused your own brother, dear fellow!'

'Mamma, the wealth is Mr. Verulam's, and he has a right to say how it shall be spent. I told you before, he made me promise never to give Basil anything. You surely would not have me break my word?'

'He would never know.'

Constance looked at her in astonishment.

'Mamma, that would not alter the fact.'

'Oh,' exclaimed Mrs. Woodroffe, angrily, 'it is always so easy to make it appear that you do what you like because it is your duty! It is the commonest of all excuses.'

Constance said no more; she knew that, on the point of Basil, her step-mother was absolutely beyond all reason. She had been greatly shocked on her return home to find how very ill Mrs. Woodroffe was looking. She did not like to alarm her father, who had apparently noticed nothing amiss, but she consulted her aunt, and heard that Dr. Mopus of

Mapleton, who saw Mrs. Woodroffe periodically, thought her very much weaker, and altogether gave a very unfavourable report.

'He spoke to your father last June,' continued Miss Lucy, 'and, for a little, Edgar was dreadfully alarmed, but, finding that everything has gone on as usual, he has got comfortable again. I think you had better not disturb him again; when he is alarmed he cannot help fussing, and it worries her. Dr. Mopus assures me there is absolutely nothing to be done.'

It was a sore annoyance to Mr. Verulam that Lord Bracton left Caenthorpe without being engaged to Yolande. He had never guessed the refusal he had received on the night of the ball, and had confidently looked forward to being able to announce the engagement at the termination of the young earl's visit. He questioned Constance closely, but she was able to assure him that Lord Bracton had said nothing during his stay at

Caenthorpe; she felt very glad that he did not ask her anything respecting the time they were at Bracton.

She specially feared his saying anything on the subject to Yolande. She knew her sister's temper was warm, and that she would brook no interference on such a point from Mr. Verulam, and dreaded lest she might say something to offend his dignity, and which might prevent his permitting her to have the girl with her, and this would, she felt, be an overflowing drop in her cup. The stiffness of the Caenthorpe arrangements had stood Yolande in good stead. *Tête-à-têtes* were hardly possible, and she had been enabled to elude Lord Bracton's attempts to secure them.

On the last night of the old year, the bells rang out a merry peal to celebrate the birth of an heir to Caenthorpe Priory. Constance had been so ill that for a time her life was despaired of, but, to the doc-

tor's surprise, she rallied, and was able to be present when her little son was duly christened Walter Edgar Woodroffe.

CHAPTER XII.

For though we sleep, or wake, or roam, or ride,
Aye fleeth the time; it will no man abide.

CHAUCER.

The poor wren,
The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
Her young ones in her nest, against the owl.

Macbeth. Act 4, Sc. 2.

EIGHT years passed away without bringing much change to Constance in the circumstances of her daily life. Mr. Verulam remained as he had always been, hard and cold, devoted to display and the cultivation of society, and determined that his wife should do all in her power to assist and further his views. She had almost learnt to detest society, because

she was never allowed to enjoy it in her own way.

Her husband chose that her visiting-list should be filled with aristocratic names, that she should exhibit her beauty, her Parisian toilettes, and her superb jewels at what he considered the 'right' houses, and should entertain the owners of such houses in return; but he would not allow her to make friends or to become acquainted with any of the people celebrated either in art or literature, who would have been far more congenial to her than were those with whom alone he chose that she should associate. He wished her to model her life exactly upon that of Lady Selina Longden, a woman whom Constance had grown as nearly to detest as was possible to one of her sweet and gentle nature.

She bore with patience Lady Selina's interference with her social arrangements, and even with her household affairs; if her husband liked her to manage everything, she had really

little interest in opposing it; she had grown indifferent to all social matters on finding the hard, stiff, cold rules to which they were to be subjected; but when Lady Selina endeavoured to exercise authority over Yolande, or to dictate as to the management of the nursery, she found to her amazement that Constance could assert herself, and remarked to Mr. Verulam that really she was very sorry to have troubled herself to give advice, as his wife chose to take it in such bad part.

Lady Selina loved above everything to domineer, and had been so accustomed to Constance's acquiescence in her dictation that it never occurred to her that it proceeded from absolute indifference to the subjects affected: and she was proportionately astonished at the discovery that, when anything she cared about was touched, Mrs. Verulam could assert herself.

Mr. Verulam at once reproved his wife for ingratitude to Lady Selina, and was quite as

astonished as that lady had been to find that there was a point beyond which her submission would not go. She said calmly but decidedly that about indifferent matters she was quite content that Lady Selina should be paramount if he preferred it, though she was not a person whom she herself at all liked; but that in anything which affected her sister's comfort or happiness, or her child's welfare, she was determined to brook no interference.

And, though Constance's voice was low and her manner gentle, Mr. Verulam never for a moment entertained a doubt that she meant what she said, and though he was greatly annoyed, and talked to her in a way that was hard to bear, and which drove Yolande to the verge of frenzy, he ceased to force Lady Selina's suggestions upon her.

Yolande lived now entirely with her sister. About four years after their visit to Bracton, Mrs. Woodroffe had died, and her husband had not survived her quite a year. Mr. Verulam

had alienated his wife as much as it was possible for him to do by the impatience he had displayed respecting the orthodox period of mourning, and by his determination that she should re-appear in society long before she considered it right to do so.

She obeyed his wishes because she regarded it as her duty to do so; but she felt a bitterness that startled and shocked herself, and which she vainly strove to overcome, towards the husband who so grievously failed in respect towards those who were dearest to her.

Involuntarily she grew colder towards him, but that to Mr. Verulam was a matter of little moment. She fulfilled all his requirements. She was immensely admired, but yet, owing to the frigid atmosphere with which he surrounded her, she had no friends or intimates, and never showed, what he imagined such 'bad form' as to appear to enjoy anything. She left none of his commands un-

executed, and dutifully arrayed herself in the dresses and jewels which he ordained. She left it entirely to him to decide who should be invited in London, or asked to Caenthorpe in the autumn. She was as coldly, correctly polite to Lady Selina Longden, excepting when she overstepped the line she had rigidly drawn, as anyone could desire. And perfectly satisfied with the surface of things, which was all for which he cared, Mr. Verulam never even guessed that his wife's life was one long regret.

She felt this infinitely more after her father's death. The sight of the comfort and peace which she had been able to bestow upon his later years, had been a balm and a comfort to her whenever her burden had seemed heavier than she could bear, and, now that that consolation was removed, life weighed heavily upon her.

She could not feel the slightest satisfaction in knowing that, by the sacrifice of her life

and happiness, Woodroffe had been restored to so flourishing a condition that, on his father's death, Basil inherited it free of all mortgages, which had been cleared off by Mr. Verulam's superior management, and by the judicious granting of building leases.

Mr. Woodroffe had vehemently opposed the latter as ruining the quietness and rural beauty of the village, but, as Mr. Verulam pointed out, he had put himself unreservedly into that gentleman's hands, and must abide by the agreement under which he had so largely profited.

Knowing much more of the world than her step-mother had ever done, Constance, when she was once free from her influence, and from the constant inculcation of the doctrine that the one end and glory of women was to be sacrificed for the advantage of the men of their house, saw Basil's selfishness in its true light, and thought bitterly that it was scarcely worth while to have wrecked

her own life—and marred another's—to enable her brother to waste money on gambling and other questionable and expensive amusements.

During the six years that had elapsed between the arrangement made by his father and Mr. Verulam, and Mr. Woodroffe's death, Basil had accumulated a fresh load of debt; and, though the estate had been handed over to him by his brother-in-law perfectly clear, he was already very seriously embarrassed.

He had tried again to induce Constance to help him with ready money, and had been most indignant when she refused, saying that, even if her promise to her husband did not prevent her doing so, she found that her resources only just sufficed for the toilettes he insisted upon.

'As if you could not get credit to any amount,' sneered Basil.

'Very likely I might. I do not choose to try. If I cannot pay ready money for any-

thing I have, I have no right to have it. Besides, that would not affect the fact of my promise.'

'Oh, that is ancient history. Of course he has forgotten all about it.'

'He never forgets. At any rate, he has never released me from my promise, and, until he does, I am powerless.'

Basil had gone away in a rage, denouncing the selfishness of women in general and of his sister in particular, and now made his appearance but seldom in Carlton Terrace. Constance was sorry, but she felt that, even if she were free to help him, all she could do would be but as a drop in the ocean, and would do him no permanent good.

Yolande's affairs had proved a source of considerable annoyance to Mr. Verulam. Lord Bracton, piqued probably by the novelty of rejection, had by no means taken her answer as final, even when she told him very decidedly a second time that she should never change. He

had lamented himself to Mr. Verulam, thereby enlightening that gentleman on a point which his wife had carefully avoided, and causing both her and Yolande immense discomfort.

Yolande's indifference to Lord Bracton quickly turned into active dislike when she found there was no hour of the day when she was safe from the sound of his name, or indeed from his presence, for Mr. Verulam invited him constantly, and, being very genuinely in love with the only woman who had ever shown the slightest disinclination for his society, he persuaded himself that with perseverance he must succeed in the end.

Very bitter were the speeches of those whose blandishments had failed to attract him, when it was found how persistently he haunted Carlton Terrace, and attached himself to Yolande's side wherever she went.

'It was really disgraceful,' kind friends declared, 'to see how Mrs. Verulam and her sister persecuted poor Lord Bracton! it was

quite scandalous, and really by this time they might have understood that he meant nothing, but was only amusing himself. It was shocking to see a girl show such a want of dignity and self-respect!'

It was well Yolande could not hear the things that were said of her: untrue as they were, they would have bitterly wounded her pride. It was quite as much as she could bear to have to listen in silence to Mr. Verulam's encomiums on Lord Bracton, and his wishes that some people could be brought to see reason, and to know that she was really dependent upon him, and could not escape from her dependence.

Sir Armine and she met at balls and parties, but Constance thought it best not to invite him to the house except on the occasion of some very large entertainment, and Mr. Verulam, having forgotten his annoyance with the young man at the Bracton Ball, had no idea that it was he who really formed the obstacle to the fulfilment of his wishes.

Yolande and her lover seldom spoke of the future. Each knew the other was unchanged, and there was little in their conversation that would have enlightened a listener as to the real state of affairs between them. It was only the brightening of Yolande's face as she caught sight of him, or the fervent pressure of their hands as they met or parted, that distinguished their manner to each other from that to anyone else. But neither dreamt of change, though each sighed in secret over the hopelessness of their fate.

Constance had rather wondered how she was to obey her husband's order that she was never again to speak to Colonel Latreille. If he came up to her at a party and spoke, as it was only natural that he should do, it would be very embarrassing to have his greeting unanswered. Yet so implicit was the obedience which she thought it right to render in place of the love that was not hers to give, that she felt she must do so.

It was, therefore, a great relief, though likewise a deep sorrow, when she first met him after their first visit to Bracton, to find that he only bowed and did not attempt to approach her.

Besides her relief at escaping the necessity of appearing rude, Constance felt that it was far safer for her not to see Bernard Latreille again. Since she knew that she had not been deceived, that he had loved her as she had loved him, she felt that her only safeguard was to dismiss him as much as possible from her mind; otherwise she must contrast him with her husband, the 'might have been' with her present cold and loveless life, and the result would be, as she well knew, to make her even more unhappy than was already the case.

She was duly grateful to him for avoiding her, and very soon she heard that he had left the Guards, to the great sorrow of his com-

rades, and had gone abroad for a long time. This relieved her of any present anticipations of awkwardness, though she could not, irrationally, help sighing at the thought that she should see him no more, even while she felt it was for the best.

The one bright spot in her life was her little son. He was her only child, and, while idolizing him as few mothers do their children, she was perpetually on her guard against spoiling him. He ran the greatest danger of over-indulgence from his father, who positively adored him, and yet, as Yolande frequently observed, seemed to think of him more as being the heir of Caenthorpe than of being his pretty, lisping child. He was a very handsome boy, resembling both father and mother, and with a look that sometimes reminded Constance of Basil, and made her determine to exert all the care in her power to prevent his growing up selfish and self-indulgent like his uncle.

While Mrs. Woodroffe lived, she did her utmost to spoil the child whenever she saw him, and declared that Constance was hard and cruel, and without natural affection, because from the very earliest moment she insisted on implicit obedience, and set herself steadfastly to combat the child's evidently strong will.

When they were at Caenthorpe, Constance let him go to the Manor as seldom as possible, and never without her, and this her step-mother was wont peevishly to resent. But Constance was firm; her child was her one precious possession, and neither Mrs. Woodroffe, with her over-indulgence, nor Lady Selina, with her unwelcome interference, should prevent her bringing him up as she thought right. Whenever she was free from the incessant claims of society, she had him constantly with her, and left him as little as was possible to the care of servants.

One point on which Mr. Verulam, incited by

Lady Selina, had a struggle with his wife was her determination to have a nursery governess for her boy when he was but two years old. Lady Selina declared it was nonsense, and terrified Mr. Verulam so much by her warnings as to the peril attendant on too early forcing of a child's brain that he went home determined to forbid the experiment.

But Constance stood firm. It was not, she said, that she wished the child to learn, though she believed a great deal of nonsense was talked about the danger of early teaching, and that a considerable amount of information could be insensibly imbibed under the guise of amusement, and a vast proportion of future drudgery thus be saved; but that, as she was obliged to leave the child a great deal, she preferred his having a lady always with him, who would be better able than a nurse to train him in habits of gentleness and obedience.

And so steadily did she hold to her deter-

mination that Mr. Verulam at length gave way to her, in spite of Lady Selina's solemn warning and reproaches as to his weakness in 'surrendering his better judgment,' and in face of the resignation of the head nurse, a very grand lady, who had been recommended by Lady Selina, and who refused to remain in the nursery when there was a divided authority.

'She must be all or nothing,' she told Constance: 'she didn't hold with young ladies as called themselves governesses a-poking about a nursery; if any such were to come into *her* nursery, she must leave.'

She was, however, considerably astonished to find this threat quietly disregarded; indeed Constance was by no means sorry to part with her, and thus regain the command of her own nursery.

Mrs. Verulam was very fortunate in the governess she found for little Walter. Mrs. Kerfote was a young widow, the daughter of a

clergyman, who had married very young, and had lost her husband and her two children. Her mother had been a German governess, and she had spent a few years in Germany with an aunt, studying to become herself a governess, and had there been very carefully instructed in the Kindergarten system in which Constance implicitly believed. There certainly seemed no danger that little Walter's brain would be injured by anything that Mrs Kerfote might teach him. He took to her at once, and was never brighter or happier than when with her.

It was curious that, devoted as his father was to him, the child never took to him. He would go to him when his mother told him, because he was accustomed to obey her implicitly, but he never did so voluntarily, and always had something of the air of a martyr while receiving his caresses.

Mr. Verulam saw nothing unnatural in this, attributing it to mere childish shyness, but

Constance, more sensitive, felt it for him, and did all in her power to overcome the boy's shrinking, but without avail. At length she ceased to struggle, believing that it would be better to leave the matter to nature, and that perhaps constant recurrence to the subject might strengthen the child's aversion and prevent the gradual forgetfulness of it for which she hoped.

Yolande was a great favourite with her nephew, and he was much pleased when after her father's death she came to live entirely with Constance. The two had famous games together, and the child was nearly as devoted to the Skye terrier, Ross, as was his mistress.

Ross was no longer very young, and had become somewhat sober and staid in his general demeanour, but he was always ready for a romp with Walter, and underwent, with the wonderful unfailing canine amiability and stoicism, all the uncomfortable and often pain-

ful endearments lavished upon him by his little playfellow.

Sometimes he would turn a look of pathetic remonstrance upon Yolande, and Mrs. Kerfote would endeavour to explain that a tail was not made to be pulled, or that there were more appropriate places for little boys' fingers than 'poor doggie's' eyes, but he never permitted himself the slightest attempt at retaliation, and the friendship between the child and the dog was complete. Indeed Yolande sometimes declared that Ross had deserted her entirely for her nephew, though the poor little fellow's uneasiness whenever she was absent for any length of time, and his rapturous joy on her re-appearance, gave little colour for her accusation.

Eight years had detracted little if at all from Mrs. Verulam's beauty; indeed she was perhaps handsomer now at thirty-three than she had been when she first married. She always looked perfectly calm, composed, and self-pos-

sessed, and superficial observers sometimes said that the fault of her face was that she had no expression; but those more thoughtful saw in it a world of repressed feeling, and the chastened beauty to which no woman attains but through suffering.

'A face with a history,' people sometimes said on first seeing her, and were generally told with ill-concealed contempt that the rich and beautiful Mrs. Verulam was 'the last person in the world likely to have anything so disagreeable as a history. She had lived in the country and never seen a human being till she married, and ever since had seemed just as cold and unimpressionable as a marble statue! There was nothing whatever in her, though she certainly was good-looking for anyone who admired that style.'

It was towards the end of the season that Mr. Verulam, driving with his wife in her Victoria along Piccadilly, saw her start violently and blush crimson. Following the direc-

tion of her eyes, he saw Colonel Latreille sauntering along the pavement. Apparently he had not perceived them.

During the eight years of his absence, Mr. Verulam had nearly forgotten Colonel Latreille's existence. As has been before said, he was not precisely of a jealous disposition, chiefly because he could not believe that anyone could be preferred to him. But he had been considerably startled and astonished by what his wife had told him as to the message with which she had charged her step-mother for him before her marriage, and which Mrs. Woodroffe had so greatly altered and softened.

'Tell him that there never can possibly be any question of love between us.' Surely that showed pretty clearly that she cared for some one else, and who could it be excepting that Colonel Latreille whom he had thought so forward at Caenthorpe and at Ashford, and about whom Lady Louisa de Vere had evidently entertained suspicion.

It was this that had made him so angry at Constance's adventure in the cave at Bracton, and that had induced him to issue the edict that she was never to speak to Colonel Latreille again. And now, though he had been absent so long that he had almost forgotten his existence, Constance greeted his re-appearance with a start and a blush that plainly showed how much she cared for him.

Mr. Verulam felt very ill-used. After all he had done for Constance, the position to which he had raised her, the wealth and jewels he had lavished upon her, his benefits to her family, and his kindness to her sister, it was surely hard that she should manifestly care for some one else, and that other one of whom he had plainly expressed his disapproval. It was ungrateful, to say the least of it, and Mr. Verulam became so morose during the rest of the drive that Constance, unaware of what he had noticed, wondered greatly what was the matter with him.

When they returned home, he retired to the library, and occupied himself for a considerable time in writing, at the end of which period the butler and footman were summoned to witness his signature to two documents, so folded, however, that they were unable to make a guess at their contents, excepting that they were short, and 'looked noways like a will.' These were enclosed in separate envelopes, differently directed, and put together into one envelope, which was again enclosed in another, addressed to his lawyer, and safely deposited in his despatch-box.

This business transacted, he dressed to dine with his wife at the Duke of Myrtleshire's in St. James's Square.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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